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Hamlet Studies

Vol. 9

1987

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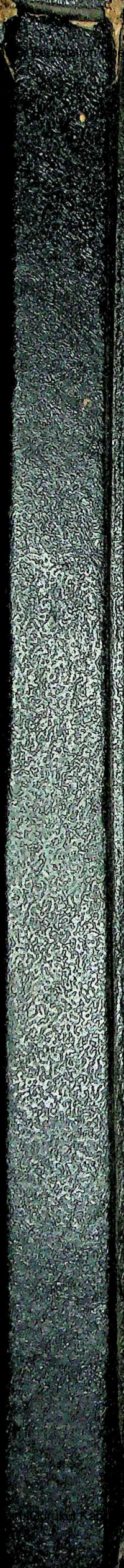

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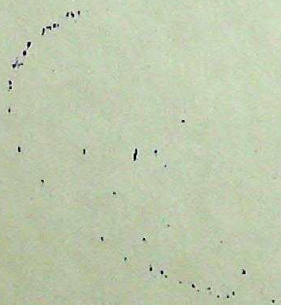

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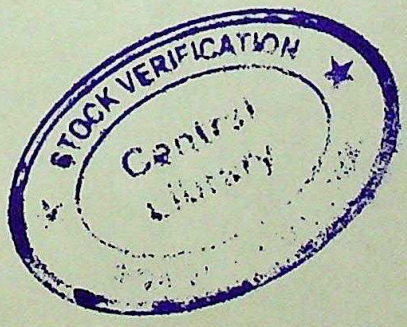

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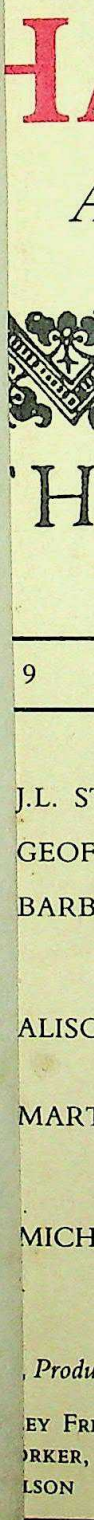

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9 Summer and Winter 1987 Nos. 1 and 2

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, Production Reports, and Reviews by

EY FRIEDMAN, AVRAM GIMBEL, ROBERT F. WILLSON, JR., W. HUTCHINGS, CHARLES
ORKER, MYTHILI KAUL, VINCENT F. PETRONELLA, BERNICE W. KLIMAN, ROBERT
LSON

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Contributors to this Issue

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VINCENT F. PETRONELLA'S article "*Hamlet*: The International Theme" appeared in Vol. 6 of *HSt*. His most recent publication on Shakespeare is an article entitled "The Place of Ecstasy in *The Merchant of Venice*," *The CEA Critic*, 48, no. 2 (Winter 1985).

J.L. STYAN, Franklyn Bliss Snyder Professor of English Literature at Northwestern University, is the author of several books on the drama: *The Elements of Drama* (1960), *The Dark Comedy* (1962), *The Dramatic Experience* (1965), *Shakespeare's Stagecraft* (1967), *Chekhov in Performance* (1971), *The Challenge of the Theatre* (1972), *Drama, Stage and Audience* (1975), *The Shakespeare Revolution* (1977), *Modern Drama in Theory and*

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Practice (3 vols., 1981) and *Max Reinhardt* (1982). He has recently completed *All's Well That Ends Well* for a new 'Shakespeare in Performance' series, and in the same year published his lectures for the University of Sydney, *The State of Drama Study* (1984). *Restoration Comedy in Performance* appeared in 1986.

MARTIN W. WALSH is Head of the Drama Concentration at the Residential College, University of Michigan. His primary area of interest is the grotesque comic in early modern popular culture and in the modern drama. He has published several articles on English medieval drama and the German *Fastnachtspiel* and through his theater group, The Harlotry Players, has mounted numerous productions of medieval and Renaissance drama, including several translations of his own. He is also Chief Dramaturg and frequent lead-actor and director for the Ann Arbor-based Brecht Company.

ROBERT F. WILLSON, JR.'s most recent contribution to *HSt* was a note entitled "The Backstage Hamlet" (Vol. 6). Professor of English and Chairman at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, he has published books and articles on Shakespeare and is currently working on a study of Hollywood Shakespearean films.

ROBERT R. WILSON, Professor of English at the University of Alberta, is a member of the editiorial board of *English Studies in Canada*. He has written extensively on topics in literary theory and Renaissance studies. He wrote on narrative in *HSt*, Vol. 6. An article exploring Shakespeare's understanding of narrative in *The Rape of Lucrece* is forthcoming in *SEL*. He has contributed several articles to the forthcoming *Spenser Encyclopedia*. He recently completed a book-length ms. on the subject of play and game concepts in literature with particular emphasis upon Spenser and Cervantes.

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Notes and Comments

In one of the escapades that Richmal Crompton's eleven-year-old hero William Brown finds himself in, his teenage sister Ethel has promised him sixpence if he can recover for her a hideous red and gold vase that was presented to her some time ago by a rich but slightly eccentric aunt whom Mrs. Brown has now invited for Christmas. William's efforts result in his tracing its whereabouts to the home of a neighbour whose daughter Dolly had once been a friend of Ethel's and the following conversation ensues:

"I mean—well, d'you remember that vase Ethel gave Dolly for her birthday present? A red an' gold one?"

"Yes, dear," said Mrs. Clavis. "I do remember. I thought it such a very odd present to give her, and so did Dolly."

"She gave it her 'cause she thought she'd like it," said William emphatically. "She took a lot of trouble givin' it her 'cause she thought she'd like it. . . . Well, we've got a friend comin' over to-morrow who's sort of int'rested in vases. In red an' gold ones, that is. An' he—she—they want to have a look at this red an' gold vase 'cause—'cause they're int'rested in red an' gold vases."

"How very odd!" said Mrs. Clavis. "But, of course, they can see it. Tell your mother to bring them to tea. How many did you say?"

"Oh, they're far too many to bring to tea," said William hastily. "I mean, there's ever so many of them. Well, I mean there's one or two. But they've got special instruments for studyin' vases an' they're much too big to take out to tea with them. They'll want to have the vase about a week to study it prop'ly." He suddenly remembered Mrs. Clavis's ineradicable interest in her neighbour's affairs, and added: "You won't see 'em in the village or anywhere. An' you won't see 'em if you come to our house either. They—they don't do anythin' but study vases. Red an' gold vases. They—they stay up in their rooms all day studyin' vases."

"I never heard anything so extraordinary," said Mrs. Clavis. "Never in all my life. I'm quite sure, my dear boy, that you've got hold of the story, whatever it is, quite wrong. You are a little apt to confuse things, you know, dear. I've often noticed it."

"Well," said William, playing for safety, "p'raps I've got it a bit wrong, but they did ask me to borrow that vase for a week while Aunt—I mean, they did want you to lend 'em that vase jus' for a bit."*

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*From "William and the Vanishing Luck" in *William and A.R.P.* by Richmal Crompton (London: George Newnes Ltd., 1939)

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The amazement of Mrs. Clavis at the activities of William's imaginary investigators is shared by many who regard *Hamlet Studies* as an outlet for the energies of a group of eccentrics trying out the "special instruments" that William invents. Yet, year after year the journal continues to attract stimulating contributions, and this year's crop is no exception.

J. L. Styan, whose books over the past twenty-five years have emphasized the importance of the play in performance, issues in "On Seeing *Hamlet* in Performance" a timely (and good humoured) warning against taking liberties with the text—a temptation to which many directors succumb. Such liberties are not only unwarranted but unnecessary too, because in *Hamlet*—uniquely in the entire range of drama—Shakespeare himself constantly surprises us with heart-stopping dramatic moments, the "Shakespeare touches," as Professor Styan calls them.

In "Hamlet and the Stoic Sage" Geoffrey Aggeler presents a view of the concept of stoicism in Shakespeare's time and, while tracing Hamlet's oscillations between passion and stoicism, shows that in this process the play questions Senecan stoicism and inclines toward a "perfect Christian stoic trust in providence and resignation." Yet, at the same time, even this stance is not whole-heartedly affirmed by the play, for the question "whether or not a sage could execute blood vengeance without abandoning his moral purpose" remains unanswerable.

Continuing the interrogative mode, Barbara A. Johnson in her paper on *Hamlet* and Castiglione's *The Courtier* argues that Shakespeare's play might well be a parody of the values *The Courtier* advocates, an exposure of the hollowness of the skills recommended by Castiglione as being worthy of acquisition, the critique finally crystallizing in the putrid skull of Yorick, who is dead, and in the foppish and despicable Osric who is alive.

The corruption of Claudius's court is also the subject of Alison Hayton's essay "'The King my father?': Paternity in *Hamlet*." Hamlet, she argues, is as one pulled in two directions: on the one hand the wassail of Claudius's bastard court whose origin lies in incest, murder, and usurpation, and, on the other, the integrity of King Hamlet's regime with its scrupulous observance of morality and honour. Whereas the old king's claim on his son is in terms of the past ("Adieu, adieu, remember me"), the new king's bid for his son / sun is in terms of the present ("You are the most immediate to our throne"). But Hamlet resists Claudius's blandishments and restores legitimacy to Denmark by leaving its future in the hands of "the two young legitimate characters," Horatio and Fortinbras.

With Martin Walsh's "'This same skull, Sir': Layers of Meaning and Tradition in Shakespeare's Most Famous Stage Prop" we return to the skull of Yorick (to which Barbara Johnson had drawn attention) which becomes in Act 5 of *Hamlet* the hub of the great wheel of Folly, Love, and Death upon which so much of Shakespeare turns." This stage prop,

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the most unforgettable in all drama, from being an exemplar of the *danse macabre* tradition moves on to become a window opening on to Hamlet's childhood and, finally, with the arrival of Ophelia's funeral procession, betokens the confluence of Fool and Maiden, a motif that had appeared in the comedies and will recur in *King Lear* (Viola-Feste Rosalind-Touchstone, Cordelia-Fool).

Michael Cohen's "'To what base uses we may return': Class and Mortality in *Hamlet* 5.1" approaches the same scene, but on a different tack from that of Martin Walsh. Class distinctions, which would seem irrelevant after Death the leveller has done his work, nevertheless persist, and are analysed in this essay. Though Hamlet is indulgent, and even condescending, towards the Gravedigger during the exchange he has with him, it is the Gravedigger who in fact routs Hamlet in argument, a reversal of our normal expectation. Ironically, and appropriately, the Gravedigger who belongs to the lower classes (literally as well, for he works below ground level and is called "Goodman Delver") will bury Hamlet before long. And Fortinbras, who comes in apparent triumph, "has yet to feel just what a leveller death can be."

* * *

Three of the papers in this issue of the journal were originally read at the *Hamlet* Symposium of the University of Arkansas held in March 1987. Some of the other papers, too, that were presented at the Symposium, will appear in subsequent issues of *Hamlet Studies*. A full account of the proceedings of the Symposium, and of the production of *Hamlet* that accompanied it, feature in this volume. *Hamlet Studies* is grateful to Professor Charles Forker of Indiana University and a member of the Advisory Board, and Professor Joseph Candido of the University of Arkansas for the time and energy they expended in collecting, organising, and editing the papers for publication in *Hamlet Studies*.

R.W.D.

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On Seeing *Hamlet* in Performance*

J. L. STYAN

Great problems confront any student or performer of a masterpiece like *Hamlet*, problems arising from its unusual popularity and familiarity. My first inclination was to call this talk "*Hamlet* is not an ink-blot test." You will remember that it was the invention of Dr. Rorschach to make a blob of ink on paper, fold the paper in two, and invite his patient to reveal his condition of mind by saying what he thought he saw there. A lot of literary criticism is just like that, and in the case of *Hamlet* there is a long tradition of treating it as a blob of ink and finding in the play an image of oneself. William Hazlitt began the procession of those who claimed that "It is *we* who are Hamlet . . . he to whom the universe seems infinite, and himself nothing . . ." (*Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, 1817). And in *Table Talk* for June 15, 1827, Samuel Taylor Coleridge took up the cry with, "I have a smack of Hamlet about me, if I may say so," referring to the Prince's habit of thinking too much. I seem to be among the few who do not feel they have this smack of Hamlet.

It grows worse. It seems to be widely assumed in all the classrooms of America that Hamlet's rebelliousness speaks for American individualism, but the same characteristic has also served the nationalism of nineteenth-century Germany and the revolutionary spirit in Tsarist Russia. Ralph Berry has recently reported in *Changing Styles in Shakespeare* (1981) that a Polish director told him, "*Hamlet* is always successful with us. Hamlet is always a Pole, and Fortinbras is the Soviet army." A later development is that a French director, one Daniel Mesguich, argues that Shakespeare was a Frenchman named Guillaume Branlelance, whose plays were stolen by a translator who took the credit for writing them (*Times Literary Supplement*, December 26, 1986). And a Japanese critic has recently declared, "There is something especially Japanese about Hamlet," so that no doubt we may expect a Kabuki *Hamlet* any day now. This is all very gratifying for the cultural export market. Nor, probably, is it difficult to explain, because *Hamlet* is a play that touches nearly every idea that matters to us, issues like good and evil, and guilt and innocence, in public life and private life, as well as the three great subjects you are not supposed to mention at dinner: religion, politics, and I forget the third.

*Keynote address to the *Hamlet* Symposium at the University of Arkansas, 6 March, 1987. All textual references are from the Arden Shakespeare, ed. Harold Jenkins, 1982.

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If we approach the play from another angle, that of its stage history it seems that *how* it is played reflects the *Zeitgeist* as much as the procession of famous actors who have played the Prince. After a line of melancholy princes led by Garrick (1775), J. P. Kemble (1783), Kean (1814), and Macready (1826), in our own day we have witnessed a complete spectrum of styles, and although the actors have spoken the same lines, the effect in each case has been quite different. Between the wars we felt the fine nobility of the romantic John Barrymore (1925) and the passionate disillusionment of the Byronic John Gielgud (1930); after World War II a line of scruffy Hamlets echoed the student rebellions of the 1960s and 1970s, modern antiheroes like David Warner (a very young prince at 24 in 1965), and a succession of angry young men in Nicol Williamson, Albert Finney, and Derek Jacobi. And as the Hamlets grew more disreputable, it was interesting that the Claudiuses began to score more points. In 1984 the notorious Chicago street-corner Hamlet of Aidan Quinn[1] so lacked majesty that it was finally possible to imagine a *Hamlet* without the Prince and to believe that Claudius possibly knew right from the beginning just what he was doing when he usurped the throne of Denmark.

If we learn anything from this kind of potted history, it is at least that the play is *alive*. It is nowadays quite proper for me to drop strong hints that a play text is only a blueprint for performance. Just a few years ago this was most *improper*, and to speak the Bard's name in the same breath with that of the theatre was to substitute tor an honorable Bardolatry a kind of Bardicide (Shaw's word for what Irving did to Shakespeare). When I went to school, all drama was read as a form of literature, with grammatical irregularities or symbolic allusions (as the case may be) capable of dissection and analysis as with any other kind of literature, and this was better done when reading by oneself in the quiet of one's room. Today I feel a little uneasy when asked to give a talk about Shakespeare: if you want to get to know him, the last thing you want is to hear a lecture. If someone is hungry, you don't put a cookbook into his hands and say, "Read page 20; you'll love the bit about the roast beef and baked potato." I say all this to remind myself that drama is a performing art, one which yields its magic as a shared experience in conditions of performance and that Shakespeare is its supreme practitioner.

I've just read Laurence Olivier's book *On Acting* (1986), and on page 7 he writes, "*Hamlet* is, pound for pound, the greatest play ever written. It towers above everything else in dramatic literature." Therein lies the problem: of all plays it has probably been the most used and abused by actors and critics alike. Certainly its theatrical tradition clings to it like

He wrote "To be, or not to be" on a brick wall in spray-paint.

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so many barnacles. In the popular repertory everywhere for years, a production of *Hamlet* was the happy occasion for bringing out the stock battlements and the stock Viking outfits. Ophelia always wore white muslin in the nineteenth century in order to suggest her delicacy and innocence; but of course they cut the smutty bits out of her mad scene. In our time, sentimentality and sympathy have given way to shock and horror, and nowadays it is common to see mad Ophelia in a suggestively torn dress, with a little mud on it from dancing among the less than symbolic willows.

Traditions grow quickly, and nowadays for example it is not unusual to have Ophelia's funeral procession enter through the audience. Eric Keown, the dramatic critic for *Punch*, was a rather tall man, and reported that when his feet stuck out on one occasion he nearly buried the whole procession. His subsequent advice was, "Never put an unwary foot in the sceptered aisle." But not only staging and business determine our expectations, characters do so themselves. It seems legitimate for Polonius to change from a comic father to a corrupt and dangerous adviser to the throne, but the translation of Osric from a fop to a fox is more questionable. Osric used always to afford a little comic relief as an affected popinjay, an easy butt for Hamlet's jokes; nowadays he has become a more sinister figure, Claudius's accomplice and flatterer, a master of protocol and all smooth talk. A good idea, you may say, except that Shakespeare would surely have arranged for, say, Horatio to finish him off at about the same time that flights of angels were singing the sweet Prince to his rest.

If we are speaking of tradition in the theatre, you should know that the modern habit of making much out of a mere hint in the text was a flourishing industry a hundred and more years ago. The scholar W. J. Lawrence, who spent many happy hours gathering titbits of stage lore, has provided us with some excellent bedside reading of the trivial pursuit variety, and in *Speeding Up Shakespeare* (1937) devoted a whole chapter to the topic, "The Folly of the Gravedigger's Waistcoats." In 1817 the *Journal* of one Louis Sismondi records the business as he saw it at that date:

> After beginning their labour and breaking ground for a grave, a conversation begins between the two Gravediggers. The chief one takes off his coat, folds it carefully, and puts it by in a safe corner; then taking up his pickaxe, spits in his hand, gives a stroke or two, talks, stops, strips off his waistcoat, still talking, folds it with great deliberation and nicety, and puts it with the coat; then an under-waistcoat, still talking; and another and another—I counted seven or eight, each folded and unfolded very leisurely in a manner always different, and with gestures faith-

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fully copied from nature. The British public enjoys this scene excessively (p. 203).

This business dates back earlier than this, for in 1806 there is an account of Stephen Kemble "of obese memory (noted for having been able to play Falstaff without stuffing)" playing the First Gravedigger and stripping off the waistcoats from so elephantine a body that he " sent the house into fits of laughter." By 1824 the number of waistcoats had increased to 23, and by 1842 the Gravedigger in the provinces had considerably augmented his part, as the actor Paul Bedford described when he played the Second Gravedigger to Edward Wright:

> As my chief digger no. 1 relieved himself of the waistcoat garment, the innocent boy-digger no. 2 encased himself in the cast-off vests, which operation created the salvos of laughter, for as no. 1 became thinner and thinner, no. 2 grew fatter and fatter (p. 208).

The play boasts a great tradition, and Dickens manages to capture its spirit when he gives some account of the strolling player of Queen Victoria's time in *Great Expectations* by creating his Mr. Wopsle, one of the great unknown Hamlets of that age:

> Whenever that undecided Prince had to ask a question or state a doubt, the public helped him out with it. As an example: on the question whether 'twas nobler in the mind to suffer, some roared yes, and some no, and some inclining to both opinions said "toss up for it" and quite a Debating Society arose. When he asked what should such fellows as he do crawling between earth and heaven, he was encouraged with loud cries of "hear, hear!"

Much theatrical clutter piles up in the name of tradition. In this century we have been particularly guilty of introducing our own sexual overtones. Now while it seems perfectly permissible in *King Lear* for Regan to make eyes at Edmund when she gets the chance (and she is in a particularly filthy temper in the scene of blinding the Duke of Gloucester when she sees her sister Goneril go off with Edmund, doubtless prompting her to urge Cornwall to put out the old man's second eye), this does not constitute a reason in *Romeo and Juliet* for suggesting that Lady Capulet has something going on the side with her favorite nephew Tybalt. It is just acceptable to see the fairies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a delightful *corps de ballet*, as did Charles Kean in 1856: his famous "shadow dance" began the tradition of turning the fairies into shapely young ladies in diaphanous dresses. Only Henry Morley poured scorn on this idea, questioning whether the more spiritual attributes of fairies could fairly be represented by such large girls. Anyway, he also wanted to know how

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fairies could cast shadows in the first place (evidently the fairies he knew did not), and the upshot of that was that the fairies of the older Victorians (perhaps I should say the other Victorians) were more often seen as little girls in tutus. However, touching up the supernatural creatures in one play does not necessarily give us leave to do so in another and the move to make the Witches in *Macbeth* into shapely young ladies in diaphanous dresses is very alarming. A bedroom scene in this play may be just acceptable, and a more attractive Lady Macbeth may well hop into bed with the tragic hero, as long as one remembers that the lady was only a boy-actor all the time.

In the development of the current shameless Shakespeare, it goes without saying that *Hamlet* has not escaped, and it is enough to name the nunnery scene. When Ophelia feels impelled to return to Hamlet his "remembrances," nowadays the suggestion of unrequited love may be reinforced with the further suggestion of her pregnancy. Well, you are all saying, Shakespeare has four other pregnant ladies in the comedies, whether they are boy actors or not. (The trivial pursuers will know them: Jaquenetta in *Love's Labour's Lost*, Helena in *All's Well*, Juliet in *Measure for Measure*, and Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*. Costard and Armado have a fight over the paternity in the first, Helena is required to produce visible evidence of having slept with Bertram, Juliet's mutuality is the cause of the sentence of death on Claudio, and Hermione's baby Perdita risks being eaten by a tragicomic bear.) However, it is not Ophelia who is the problem in our play, but Hamlet himself.

After Freud discovered the Oedipus complex, and Dr. Ernest Jones wrote about Hamlet's trouble with his mother (the first investigation as early as 1910), the play was a ticking clock. Jones's work on the infantile desires of Shakespeare's heroes had previously embraced Lear's relationship with his daughter, Lady Macbeth's with her father, and Richard III's with his hump, and it was only a matter of time before Hamlet was infected. His suicidal tendencies and touches of madness could, after all, be partly explained by his Oedipal desire to kill his father and marry his mother—which Claudius had managed to do with far less conscience. Of course, killing your father and marrying your mother is not always going to result in the kind of brilliant poetry we associate with the Prince. Moreover, Freudian theory implies that Hamlet did not know what he was doing, and the question of Hamlet's sanity can easily become a question of Shakespeare's. (I wrote about this in my book *The Shakespeare Revolution*, 1977, and you'll forgive me for borrowing a point or two for this occasion).

In the theatre the big scene between Hamlet and Gertrude suddenly demanded another kind of attention. and in 1935, in John Dover Wilson's

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book *What Happens in Hamlet* (1935), what everyone had previously called "the closet scene" became "the bedroom scene." I got wind of a production somewhere in central Europe (doubtless Prague or Vienna) in the late'twenties which actually dared to put a bed on the stage, and Gielgud's new *Hamlet* of 1936 in New York also chose to glorify this "couch for luxury and damned incest" by showing it, so that now the bedroom scene is with us forever. When Hamlet jumps on the bed in order to stab Polonius through the arras, the great era of the phallic sword has begun.

It is now my intention to change the tune, to tell no more stories, but touch on some of the qualities that make this play irresistible as drama, and always worth seeing in performance. Not all the encrustations of the playhouse, not all the machinations of the critical theorists, can explain away its abiding element, arguably so important for all theatre, of the *unpredictable*, the *unknown*, that in this play can repeatedly astonish us no matter how many times we see it.

The predictable unpredictable is a paradox. As the old actor said, "I had an overnight success, but I spent my whole life preparing for it." Why do audiences want to go again and again to see *Hamlet*? Why is it different from production to production? Why is it different from night to night? Surely after the hundreds and thousands of productions of this well-known play they can get it right by now? A painter will dab forever at his canvas, a poet will tinker with his choice of words endlessly, but eventually each will say, "There! I've finished. Take it or leave it." Isn't that what happens to a play also? No, it is not like that at all. In the Greek, *drama* means something to do, something to be done, yet in a performing art what has to be done has scarcely started when the words are written. They have to be spoken and embodied and transmitted and then received and perceived and understood by an audience, before they may be said to have become part of the amazing mechanism of performance. And the best place to begin may not be with the text, but with the eyes and ears by which it is perceived. Matching what we see with that we hear is an astonishing fusion, a wonderful combustion that sparks our interest and excitement, so that the actor and the spectator share the feast. Putting two and two together is the one creative act demanded of an audience in the theatre, especially if they will make five.

The unexpected perceptions come first in small details. For example, in the nunnery scene not just Hamlet, but also Claudius and Polonius are shown to abuse the wretched Ophelia. She is usually thrust away by her former lover on the ugly line, "Get thee to a nunnery" (ugly here whether you believe that a nunnery means a house of either good or ill repute, since it is nicely ambiguous). Thus she lies crying on the floor

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when Claudius and Polonius come from behind the arras where they have been eavesdropping on the scene. One might think that her father and the king might have hurried to comfort her, but all she hears from Polonius is:

> How now, Ophelia?
> You need not tell us what Lord Hamlet said,
> We heard it all. (3.1.180–2).

How to play this moment? Perhaps she looks up at her father with tears in her eyes, begging for a little sympathy, for the "How now?" is "What do you want?" or even "What's the matter with you?" Perhaps she wanted only to give a report of the conversation with Hamlet, and was about to speak. Yet, even though Polonius had heard the thrice-repeated rejection of "To a nunnery," the father walks right past his daughter, possibly an even greater act of cruelty. It is certainly an illuminating and a moving moment on the stage.

The play is full of such small, revealing moments, the "Shakespeare touches:"

—Who would have thought that the Ghost had sensitive feelings? But what of those lines, " It is offended/See, it stalks away"? (1.1.53)

—From the very beginning it is suggested that Claudius likes Laertes more than Hamlet: "What wouldst thou have, Laertes? (1.2.50.)

—Did you notice that Hamlet is happy for the first time when he decides on his mousetrap plan, "The play's the thing . . . ," so that everyone at court sees "a kind of joy" in him (3.1.18), but without knowing the reason why? A nicely ironic touch.

—And observe how in the play scene Hamlet is much more interested in his mother than in his uncle: "Look you how cheerfully my mother looks" (3.2.124) is the first of several reminders.

—Nor in her madness does Ophelia omit to give flowers first to her brother: "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance" (4.5.173), a quick reminder of their earlier sibling bond.

And so on, a hundred-and-one details that suggest their author's sensitivity to the stage.

Surprising insights come when we make the effort to see with Shakespeare's eyes, and this is very true where a stage property is involved. In Shakespeare the props are comparatively few, unlike those of the crowded stage of a realistic, Victorian playwright, an Ibsen or a Chekhov. On the unreal stage of the Elizabethans, a simple dagger or a crown, a letter or a ring, can make a powerful statement. *Hamlet* the play and Hamlet the

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character are granted the blessing of being given one of the most evocative indeed one of the most slippery and unpredictable, props in the canon o his plays. I refer to the magic skull that turns up in 5.1. Let me read th lines.

GRAVEDIGGER. . . . Here's a skull now hath lain in the earth three and twenty years.
HAMLET. Whose was it?
GRAVEDIGGER. A whoreson mad fellow's it was. Whose do you think it was?
HAMLET. Nay, I know not.
GRAVEDIGGER. A pestilence on him for a mad rogue! A poured a flagon of Rhenish on my head once. This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the King's jester.

To this moment the skull for Hamlet had been a comic skull, even if *we* saw it as the remains of that pretty girl we recently saw as Ophelia. But this skull is a magic skull, because it is going to change from moment to moment before our very eyes. And now that it is identified as Yorick's skull, someone Hamlet himself knew as a child, the smile will drop from his face, even if it is another nice Shakespearean touch that this grinning death's head should be that of a *jester*. Hamlet takes it in his hand:

HAMLET. This?
GRAVEDIGGER. E'en that.
HAMLET. Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath born me on his back a thousand times, and now—how abhorred in my imagination it is. My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. . . .

And as his mind and ours turn to human mortality, the skull unexpectedly changes again:

Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come. Make her laugh at that.
(5.1.166–89)

If *we* see Ophelia in this skull, *he* sees Gertrude. Yet that is not all, and the skull has one more service to perform. If the great Alexander must come to this, so also must a humble Prince Hamlet: "To what base uses we may return, Horatio." In Olivier's film, the camera made the point by having the shadow of the actor's head fall across the skull, so that we

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seemed to see the flesh and the bone at the same time. We could not laugh at that.

Yet the really astonishing scenes of unpredictability seem in Shakespeare to arise from the freedom of the Elizabethan stage. We have become increasingly aware of his episodic structure of scenes since Piscator and Brecht opened up the idea of epic theatre and Rubik invented his cube. I believe this effect of scene juxtaposition is called *parataxis*, which in grammar indicates when sentences are linked without a conjunction, or in the original Greek means to draw up an order of battle. Elizabethan free staging permits wildly unexpected parataxis, extraordinary shifts of tone and tempo, mood and perspective. When such a shift takes place, the audience is compelled to make unnatural leaps of the imagination, and is thereby energized into perceiving new links between the elements of the play. For example, a court can change to a tavern, England to France, Egypt to Rome, as easily as having the actors walk off or on to the stage, but every time this happens, the stage forces a contrast and a comparison. And the next change in the sequence complicates the matter unconscionably.

Hamlet begins like *Upstairs/Downstairs*. The night the Ghost appears on the battlements is quite a night for Elsinore. Downstairs they are celebrating Claudius' triumph with cannon, drum, and trumpet; upstairs they are waiting for the Ghost who will set in train the Prince's tragedy. Downstairs all is noise and shouting and laughter; upstairs "The air bites shrewdly; it is very cold." Downstairs, "The King doth wake tonight, and takes his rouse"; upstairs, the kind of experience to be had is mind-boggling. The audience is alerted to the two levels of response: on one level a colorful thriller of murder and revenge, on another the brooding anger that goes with it, the sickness of self-doubt and the smell of mortality. Thus with Hamlet we are all set for a schizophrenic, head-spliting experience in the theatre, worried by mundane matters like the girl-friend and what mother is doing with uncle, while all the time someone is trying to put your immortal soul to the test.

However, the greatest unpredictability of Shakespeare's theatrical genius shows itself when the scene shifting involves an attack upon our composure. Into the sequence of, say, king and traitor he may choose to insert a clown: a Fool or a Falstaff. Suddenly on Lear's blasted heath he can introduce a mad trial or a mock suicide, neither essential to the narrative drift of the story. Suddenly when the hero of *Measure for Measure* is about to be executed, Shakespeare brings on a comic executioner in the shape of Pompey Bum the pimp. Suddenly when the stage is alive with the horror of the murder of King Duncan in *Macbeth*, who should turn up but some drunken porter!

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The Lord Chamberlain's Men of course employed a clown or two in the company, and the Elizabethan audience must always have wondered when and where Shakespeare was going to bring them on. Quite a metatheatrical game must have ensued: how best to wedge your clown into the action without upsetting Holinshed, spoiling Plutarch. If you were Hamlet, where would you prefer to have your comic gravedigger jokes? Near the beginning, just before the Ghost of your father appears? At the end, perhaps, just after you have been giving your all in your death scene and strongly suggesting that "the rest is silence" (5.2.363). As we know, there was one other place where Shakespeare could get even with his tiresome prince and the audience at the same time, and that was in that pretty scene where his girl-friend was to be buried.

Hamlet is full of unexpected verbal/visual spatial effects. Who except Shakespeare would have thought of writing two soliloquies one after the other, as when Claudius is caught at prayer ("O, my offence is rank") by his intended assassin: "Now might I do it pat" (3.3.36ff), an extraordinary challenge in staging that has in the past resulted in a range of sensations. Perhaps the most unusual was that of John Gielgud in 1934: when Claudius knelt to pray, he put down his sword, so that on Hamlet's subsequent line "Up, sword" (line 88), he stole it, and the scene ended with Claudius looking everywhere and naturally going off terribly worried. But for interesting spatial effects I suppose the Play Scene (3.2) offers one of the most unusual experiments in the history of the theatre, if only because it divides the Globe platform into four or five acting areas. In this it is the outstanding example in Shakespeare of what has been called "simultaneous staging," whereby the audience is asked to witness, balance, and weigh several actions happening at one time. Therefore my final example of *Hamlet's* words-in-space, of what can be interpreted only by seeing it in performance, is another example of simultaneous staging: the moment of Hamlet's best-known soliloquy, "To be, or not to be" (3.1.56).

The first thing to make clear is that this speech is *not* a soliloquy. I've just reread a six-page footnote on it by Harold Jenkins in the Arden edition (1982) which nowhere remarks that Hamlet is not alone. Yet Polonius has just ordered Ophelia to her devotions, and the Prince will later spot her at her "orisons"—in performance she is frequently to be seen kneeling in prayer in some dim corner of the stage. And Polonius has also invited the King to "bestow" himself and "withdraw," which he does. I like to think this unholy pair remain as a bump behind the arras, because not only does Hamlet make the unexpected reference to Polonius in the line "Where's your father?" (line 130), so prompting the long stage tradition of having the old man pop out his head at this point

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but also, as we saw, Polonius later tells his daughter that they heard everything. Do I hear you wondering why all this pedantic nit-picking? The answer has everything to do with playgoing and performance.

In performance, even if all these characters were *not* on the stage, the audience would be looking for them. For while we are listening to Hamlet's speech, we are certainly thinking about, and must think about, three things at once: Hamlet as he talks to us, Ophelia at her prayers, and the King and Polonius at their plotting. Shakespeare helps us by his visual reminders. Thus the intense interest of "To be, or not to be" lies not so much in whether Hamlet is speaking of killing himself or of killing Claudius, not so much whether life is worth living or whether it is not (all wonderfully ambiguous questions in themselves), but rather that we must measure what is said in a context that is both religious and political. Pious Ophelia doesn't want her lover to take his own life and commit mortal sin, but the King wouldn't mind if he did. It is our pleasure as spectators to have to juggle several ideas in the air together. In a fairly recent production Derek Jacobi chose to address his speech to Ophelia's back, I'm told, presumably to remind the audience that she is present all the time; but there was really no need, any more than he need yell "Where's your father?" at the bump in the arras.

I hope I have come a little closer to what I mean by "the unpredictable." Some stage effects are very predictable. It is not customary to drink real drinks when they are called for on stage, but there was an occasion in 1870 when for greater realism the actors used real champagne for the toasts in a party scene. The result was predictable, and might be thought of as early Stanislavsky: the actors staggered about and fell over the scenery and were thoroughly themselves.

In Shakespeare and all good drama the unpredictable is paradoxically a *planned* unpredictability, and its unknown effects are to be located less visibly—in the imagination of the audience. In his great edition of the *Plays* in 1765, Dr. Johnson hinted at the irony of all this when he discussed the hot topic of Hamlet's madness: "The pretended madness of Hamlet causes much mirth, the mournful distraction of Ophelia fills the heart with tenderness;" but he added that Hamlet "plays the madman most when he treats Ophelia with so much rudeness, which seems to be useless and wanton cruelty."[2] Johnson seems to be asking us to decide who is more insane, Ophelia or Hamlet himself? One thing *is* predictable: no spectator can avoid the issue, and in wondering who is mad in this play, it is hard, Pirandellically speaking, not to acquire a touch of insanity oneself.

[2] The Yale *Works of Samuel Johnson*, vol. VIII, 1968, p. 1011.

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In fact, we are increasingly able to see that the audience is compelled to be maddeningly involved as much in Shakespeare's problems as Hamlet's, and so we join the increasing band of metadramatic critics. If Hamlet doesn't know whether to believe the Ghost, neither does Shakespeare and neither should we. The play-within-the-play explores the question of guilt and innocence: yet you cannot be sure that it proves Claudius' guilt, for it tells us more about the Prince than it does the King. We know it is Ophelia's grave long before Hamlet jumps into it with his sword drawn, and so we share with the author the choice of reactions a Hamlet may make to her death. And at the end of the play Hamlet is still trying to explain what he is all about to those on and off the stage, especially to us:

> You that look pale and tremble at this chance,
> That are but mutes and audience to this act.
> (5.2.339–40)

But we've been here all the time, sweet Prince, helping Shakespeare put your play together. We saw it all. We saw rather more than you did.

Nevertheless, only in the theatre, in performance, can we put plays together, eyes and ears busily synthesizing. As for *Hamlet*, the greatest ink-blot of them all, you may remember T. S. Eliot's sorry verdict in 1919, that the play was an artistic failure, a bad play, the bottle too small for its contents. C. S. Lewis' answer seems to be about right: "We want more of these bad plays!"

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Hamlet and the Stoic Sage*

GEOFFREY AGGELER

Let us imagine a Renaissance Neostoic, such as Sir William Cornwallis the Younger, or Philippe de Mornay, or Joseph Hall, watching an early performance of *Hamlet* at the Globe sometime between 1599 and 1602. Mornay would be on an embassy from France, busy about promoting the interests of the Protestant cause and perhaps his Calvinist disposition would keep him away from the theatre, but then again the memory of his good friend Sir Philip Sidney, who had a taste for Senecan tragedy, might influence him to attend. Joseph Hall, who had only recently given up the writing of Juvenalian formal verse satire and was about to enter the Anglican Church, might have had similar Calvinistic scruples. Sir William Cornwallis, whose essays are full of Shakespearean echoes, would have had no such scruples and probably did attend it, perhaps in company with his friend John Donne.

The Neostoic playgoer would certainly recognize the familiar outline of the model that emerges from Seneca's moral writings, the sage. He would perhaps discern part of it in the "To be, or not to be" (3.1.55–88) soliloquy as Hamlet considers the option of passively enduring the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. He would certainly recognize it fully sketched out in the encomium on Horatio (3.2.63–72). It would, presumably, be gratifying to the moral sense of this playgoer to watch Hamlet progress from envy and admiration for the Stoic ideal to the Stoic faith he expresses in the play's final scene. Hearing "the readiness is all," he might even conclude that Hamlet's *anagnorisis* has led him to Christian Stoic faith. Cornwallis might turn to Donne and quote from Seneca's *De Providentia* as a kind of summation: "What is the duty of a good man? To offer himself to Fate."

Donne might nod thoughtfully in reply, but it is doubtful whether he would agree that the tragedy's meaning could be reduced to this. For he would have been unable to miss the scepticism implicit in the dramatic contexts within which Hamlet utters Stoic commonplaces and expresses his admiration for the Stoic ideal. As the author of the sceptical *Satire III*, he would certainly perceive that Hamlet's expressions of Stoic faith in the last scene do not fully answer the questions he has raised in earlier meditations, especially in the "To be, or not to be" soliloquy.

The attitude of Hamlet himself toward Stoicism and its embodiment in the Stoic sage is obviously ambivalent. On the one hand, he admires

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Horatio and envies his freedom from destructive passion, his *apatheia*. On the other, he is acutely aware of the limitations of Stoic rationalism. When he tells Horatio that there are more things in Heaven and Earth than are dreamt of in his philosophy, he is apparently referring to the limitations of natural philosophy in general and Horatio's Stoic rationalism in particular. Horatio's reputation as a "scholar" had prompted Bernardo and Marcellus to seek his verification of the apparition they saw on the battlements. With the confidence of an academic natural philosopher and a rationalist whose learning has not been tested beyond the confines of Wittenberg University, Horatio had "explained" the ghost as a figment of their "fantasy" before he even saw it. The explanation is obviously inadequate but no more so than the numerous attempts by Shakespearean scholar-critics to "explain" the ghost in terms of ideas and commonplace notions that were current in Shakespeare's time. Like the motives of Iago, the more it is explained the more elusive it becomes. Hamlet's remark to Horatio alerts the audience to the danger of relying upon learning that is insufficiently based on experience in a world that challenges Stoic faith in its underlying, all-permeating reason.

In his "To be, or not to be" soliloquy, Hamlet in effect juxtaposes Stoic *virtus* and Machiavellian *virtù*.[1] Passively enduring the blows of fortune and actively committing one's energies to mastering her are alternative responses that appear to be very different from each other. What they have in common is an adherence to purpose, the moral purpose of the sage and the political or military purpose of the man of action. Identifying the latter with Machiavellian *virtù* may not be wholly justified by the text but is nonetheless tempting because Shakespeare sets up the same juxtaposition, though in a different manner, in a play that may have been written about the same time as *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*. In *Troilus and Cressida*, he embodies the Stoic sage in Agamemnon, whose address to his lieutenants in the Greek council of war scene (1.3.1–30) is a lengthy distillation of the main ideas in Seneca's *De Providentia* and *De Constantia Sapientis*. As a way of glossing over his own ignorance of the reasons why the Greek siege has failed, Agamemnon urges his lieutenants to manifest Stoic *virtus*. After Nestor attempts to "apply" Agamemnon's words, Ulysses utters his great speech on degree and order, whereby he attempts to draw Agamemnon out of his Stoic retreat into an assertion of leadership. His speech appeals to commonly held beliefs in the moral necessity of reverence for degree, but its purpose is thoroughly pragmatic

[1]For discussion of what these concepts have in common, see Neal Wood, "Some Common Aspects of the Thought of Seneca and Machiavelli," *Renaissance Quarterly* XXI (1968), 11–23.

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The obvious reason why he wants Agamemnon's authority re-established is that Agamemnon is willing to let Ulysses do most of his thinking for him. Yet in fact Ulysses exerts no control whatever over the major events of the play. In terms of achieving concrete ends, he is as ineffectual as his commander, and the "policy" he practises, as Thersites remarks, "grows into an ill opinion" (5.4.8–16).[2] Indeed the development of *Troilus and Cressida* as a whole illustrates Hamlet's point in the first five lines of "To be, or not to be," that Stoic resignation and commitment to action are equally futile courses. To take arms against a sea of troubles is to beat back the tide with a broom, yet, paradoxically, one may indeed "end them" for oneself if one could, by opposing them, achieve self-annihilation.

The key phrase in the soliloquy is "nobler in the mind." Even as he juxtaposes being and not-being, and two opposed modes of adhering to purpose, Hamlet is also in effect juxtaposing subjective and objective reality and giving primacy to the former. The real question is not one of whether in fact passive endurance is a nobler course than active commitment but how the mind perceives the alternatives. Paradoxically, though his subjective stance appears to reduce Stoic *virtus* and *virtù* to the same level of futility, it is in fact in harmony with what Gordon Braden has called "the logic of Stoic retreat."[3] The external world is utterly devalued against the reality of the inner world, the judging self, yet curiously this devaluing does not lead to any sort of affirmation of self sufficiency. It leads instead, as Hamlet's soliloquy reveals, to a longing for the ultimate retreat—annihilation. Hamlet had expressed the same longing in an earlier soliloquy: "O that this too too solid flesh would melt/Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!" (1.2.129–130). In that soliloquy, too, he expresses Christian scruples about suicide, but as "To be, or not to be" reveals, they are based mainly on the fear that suicide will not lead to annihilation, that the burden of consciousness will continue in the next world.

Classical Stoic philosophy has little to say about "The undiscover'd country." Marcus Aurelius leaves open the question of whether or not there is an afterlife.[4] The Stoic eschatology presented in *The Aeneid* by Anchises (VI. 718–748) appears to express a belief that the divine spark lives on and presumably, after "nothing is left but pure/Ethereal sentience and the spirit's essential flame," it is destined for reunion with the *Logos*

[2] For a fuller discussion, see my article "Madness in Reason: A Paradoxical Kinship in *Troilus and Cressida*," *Wascana Review*, IX, Renaissance issue (Spring 1974), 39–57.

[3] Gordon Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy and the Senecan Tradition Anger's Privilege* (New Haven & London: Yale UP, 1985), 23.

[4] Marcus Aurelius, *Communings with Himself*, XII. 5.

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spermatikos.[5] Seneca is inconsistent on the subject, but Braden seems to be right in attaching greater significance to those passages in which he in effect denies the soul's immortality than those in which he seems to affirm it.[6] Again, Hamlet's sense of the limitations of Stoic natural philosophy is apparent. Among the things not dreamt of in natural philosophy is the whole realm of Christian eschatology, but the fact that Hamlet refers to this too as a "dream" emphasizes the extent of his own uncertainty. His superiority to the sage in understanding is, like the unmatched wisdom of Socrates, based on his superior awareness of what he does not know.

"To be, or not to be" may be fruitfully compared with Hieronimo's "*Vindicta mihi* soliloquy in *The Spanish Tragedy* (3.13.1–44)[7] upon which it may have been at least partly modeled. Like Hamlet, Hieronimo considers alternative responses to his situation—Christian patience or Stoic resignation vs. active commitment against a sea of troubles. Like Hamlet's soliloquy, his speech reveals his growing awareness of the inadequacy of the conventional views of human experience represented by these alternatives. By the end of *The Spanish Tragedy* Hieronimo is made to see what Hamlet intuits at the outset of his tragedy, that there are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in anyone's "philosophy."[8] Hieronimo, like Hamlet, is able to consider the alternatives critically, but, unlike Hamlet, he finds one acceptable and resolves to act: "And death's the worst of resolution" (3.13.9). Hamlet's reflections are finally inconclusive and "resolution" is "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." Hearing the soliloquy, Donne might remark to Cornwallis that a sceptic's meditations are always inconclusive.

As has been frequently pointed out, Hamlet's scepticism appears to echo Montaigne's. Like Montaigne in his early pro-Stoic essays, Hamlet is capable of idealizing the Stoic sage. His encomium on Horatio, like Montaigne's "Of Constancie" and "Of Cato the Younger," praises "a patterne, whom nature chose to shew how farre humane vertue may reach, and mans constancie attain unto."[9] Of course Montaigne expresses

[5] *donec longa dies, perfecto tempor is or be,*
concretam exemit labem, purumque reliquit,
aetherium sensum atque aurai simplicis ignem,
has omnes, ubi mille rotam volvere per annos
trans. II. 747–748 C. Day Lewis, *The Aeneid of Virgil* (New York: Doubleday, 1953), 151. Cf. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* VII. 148–49.

[6] Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy*, 23–24, 228 note 27.

[7] *The First Part of Hieronimo and The Spanish Tragedy* ed. Andrew S. Cairncross (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska, 1967).

[8] See my article "The Eschatological Crux in *The Spanish Tragedy*," forthcoming in *JEGP* (Summer 1987).

[9] *The Essayes of Michael Lord of Montaigne*, trans. John Florio (London: Henry Frowde, 1904) Vol. I, p. 277, "Cato the Younger."

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a very different view of Stoicism and the ideal of the sage in his later work *An Apologie of Raymond Sebond*. Man's illusions about the extent of his knowledge and about his ability to function as a purely rational being are among the main targets of this lengthy and devastating attack on human pride, and the Stoics, with their belief in the possibility of *apatheia*, are the most conspicuous perpetrators of such illusions. The most dangerous of these illusions is that through an exercise of natural virtue man may raise himself above humanity: "It is for our Christian faith, not for his Stoicke vertue, to pretend or aspire to this divine Metamorphosis, or miraculous transmutation."[10]

Intuitively, Hamlet grasps what Montaigne had acquired during the twenty-year period he was writing the *Essais*, a sense of man as a *profond labyrinthe* whose complexity is not sufficiently recognized by the Stoics or any other moral dogmatists.[11] The wonder mixed with disgust he expresses in his encomium on man (2.2.299–304) reveals the range of feelings aroused by his rapidly growing understanding of labyrinthine human nature. Unlike Montaigne, however, Hamlet is not led by his scepticism into a total rejection of Stoicism. Rather, like Montaigne's disciple Pierre Charron, he achieves a kind of reconciliation of Christian Stoic faith with scepticism.

As Rosalie Colie remarks, scepticism is "more a method than a system of philosophy."[12] The sceptic challenges every assumption and received notion, questions every appearance and opinion, and doubts his way toward the truth without ever assuming that absolute truth is accessible to human reason. At first glance it would appear that sceptics and Stoics have little in common, but in fact they have a great deal in common. Since both distrust appearances and the whole realm of opinion, both feel compelled to suspend judgement. Stoic faith and scepticism would seem to be antithetical, but as Charron demonstrates, sceptical doubting can lead to a reaffirmation of Christian Stoic faith. Under the influence of Montaigne, from whom he borrows a great deal, Charron applies a sceptical or pyrrhonist approach to the problem of helping man to know himself. He begins *De la Sagesse* with the familiar Socratic and Neostoic dictum that the proper study of mankind is man: ". . . . la vraye science & le vray estude de l'homme, c'est l'homme."[13] There

[10] *Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 368.

[11] I am indebted to Professor Peter Hampshire of the University of Kent, Canterbury, for some enlightening conversations about Montaigne. He pointed out to me that Montaigne's eventual rejection of Stoicism is actually anticipated in the early essays, for instance "Of Drunkenness."

[12] Rosalie L. Colie, *Paradoxia Epidemica* (Princeton, 1966), 398.

[13] Pierre Le Charron, *De La Sagesse Livres Trois* (Bordeaus: Simon Millanges, 1601), I. British Museum copy.

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are, he asserts, three "sorts of people in the world, as three conditions and degrees of spirits."[14] The lowest level consists of those "weake and plaine spirits" capable only of obeying, serving and following "who in effect are simply men." At the second stage are "they that are of an indifferent judgement, who make profession of sufficiencie, knowledge, dexterity: but do not sufficiently vnderstand and iudge themselves." This deficiency causes them to rely upon commonly received notions and to refrain from pursuing the truth beyond them because they are persuaded that such inquiry is unlawful. These individuals are actually more contemptible than those of the lower level whose "base and tender capacitie" will not allow them to be anything but obedient servers and followers, because they wilfully blind themselves: "and never looking farther than where they be, but thinking that it is euery where so, or ought to be so, and that if it be otherwise, they are deceiued, yea they are barbarous" (pp. 168–169). To aid them in their self-deception, they "subiect themseues to opinions" and the customs and beliefs of their narrow environments. Among those who could be characterized as being of this "barbarous" sort are those "of the schoole and jurisdiction of Aristotle, affirmers, positive men, dogmatists, who respect more vtilitie than veritie, according to the vse and custome of the world, than that which is good and true in it selfe."[15]

Charron concludes his damning assessment of this second sort with the melancholy observation that they are very numerous and "the principall and most active amongst them gouerne the world, and haue the command in their hand." In contrast, those of the "third and highest stage" are few in number, men of "quick and cleare spirit, a strong, firme, and solid judgent," who will not be contented with commonly received notions and opinions. Such men are acutely aware of the deceptiveness of appearances and are capable of dispassionately seeking the true causes of things, "louing better to doubt, and to hold in suspence their beleefe, than by a loose and idle facilitie or lightnesse, or precipitation of iudgement to feede themselues with lies, and affirme or secure themselues of that thing whereof they can haue no certaine reason" (p. 169). Among these very rare individuals are those "of the Schoole of *Socrates* and *Plato*, modest, sober, staied, considering more the veritie and realitie of things than the vtilitie; who if they be well borne, hauing with that aboue mentioned probitie and government in manners, they are truly wise, and such as heere we seeke after." Naturally such men are suspected and

[14] Pierre Charron, *Of Wisdome Three Bookes*, trans. Samson Lennard (London: Blount, 1608), 169. British Museum copy.
[15] *Ibid.*

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despised by the opinion-dominated majority who call them "fantasticks" and "philosophers," which term they use as a pejorative.

I will not argue that Hamlet's reconciliation of Christian Stoicism with scepticism is the same as Charron's. For Charron, faith is never seriously threatened by scepticism.[16] With Hamlet, on the other hand, there is a tension, a perpetual conflict between a self that aspires to the ideal of the sage, tranquil in *apatheia* and in its certainty of moral purpose, and a sceptical self that continually questions the beliefs that would make it possible to maintain the stance of the sage. His psychomachia is in some ways like that depicted in Philippe de Mornay's deeply moving work *Lord of Plessis his Teares. For the death of his Sonne. Vnto his Wife Charlotte Baliste.*[17] For Hamlet, as for Mornay, the choice of Stoic faith over scepticism is exceedingly difficult.

Hamlet's yearning to emulate the sage is most fully expressed in the encomium on Horatio, which focuses principally on his apparent *apatheia* or freedom from destructive passion. His own inability to achieve *apatheia* has been revealed repeatedly before he utters this speech, and it will be revealed again, most dramatically in the graveyard after his experiences on the sea voyage have supposedly led him to the Stoic faith he expresses to Horatio (5.2.8–11 & 205–210).[18] Clearly, he himself is "passion's

[16] In the view of Jean Daniel Charron, the pyrrhonism of Charron "does not touch dogma, but is the foundation of *Sagesse*. As soon as it has served the purpose, it is discarded and has no place in the strong construction of the moral of the *sage*. Descartes uses the same process in his *Discours de la Methode*." (*The "Wisdom" of Pierre Charron An Original and Orthodox Code of Morality*, Chapel Hill: Univ. of No. Carolina, 1960, p. 122). See also Anthony Levi, *French Moralists The Theory of the Passions* (Oxford, 1964), 101

[17] Philippe de Mornay, Seigneur du Plessis (1549–1623) was a very prolific French Neostoic moralist, Protestant theologian, political leader, and diplomat. His many works were translated into English soon after their appearance on the continent in either French or Latin. Any account of the Stoic revival in England should include reference to the probable influence of his well known works. In *Lord of Plessis his Teares*, we see that he, like Hieronimo in *The Spanish Tragedy*, is driven by grief for his dead son into an agonizing reappraisal of his orthodox Christian assumptions that the heavens are just: "Here is a sad breach of natures order, for the father to prepare the funerall of the Sonne: for the father to be the Sons surviver. *All the thoughts of my heart are now turned into confusion.* All my affaires in my house, in my heart, all quite confounded; vtterly out of frame!" (British Museum copy, trans. John Healey). Unlike Hieronimo, Mornay is able to maintain his faith in heavenly justice, but he nonetheless experiences the same bitter, threatening inner battle between a self committed to orthodox fideism and a sceptical self that raises the great questions raised in *Job*. Finally, however, his faith reasserts itself and he tries to console his wife with the thought that their son had perished before he could be corrupted by the world. His Stoic-Calvinist sense of the universal depravity of mankind assists him in accepting their irreparable loss as part of a benevolent providential design.

[18] All quotations and line references are from *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* ed. Irving Ribner & G. L. Kittredge (New York: Wiley, 1971).

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slave," and no amount of Stoic faith will change that. Equally clear is the fact that while Hamlet himself expresses a Stoic view of passion as evil and corrupting, his own actions imply a very different view of passion on the part of the playwright. For one thing, passion is shown to be the only means whereby Hamlet is ever able to overcome his inability to fuse thought with action. As long as he has even a moment to collect himself and reflect, he will refrain from acting on his resolutions.

This is shown most clearly in the two scenes immediately following the "Mousetrap." There is of course considerable room for argument over the question of whether or not Hamlet is rationalizing when he decides not to murder the praying Claudius (3.3.73–96). One reason for believing that he is rationalizing is that his stated motive, to damn Claudius, is at odds with what is revealed about his character in earlier soliloquies. Among other things, he reveals himself to be a man hampered by Christian scruples. His excuse for not killing Claudius is an ingenious rationalization that would be a believable motive for a stereotypical revenger, such as Nashe's Cutwolfe in *The Unfortunate Traveler* or Chettle's Hoffman or Tourneur's Vindice, but not for him. A little while later, at the height of his rage against Gertrude, he kills Polonius believing that it is the king. While it can be argued that Hamlet is acting in accord with his stated intention of killing Claudius while he is involved in an "act that has no relish of salvation in't," it seems more likely that he is motivated, or controlled, by the passion of the moment, unmediated by reflection, even as in the final scene he does succeed in killing the king while in a state of high passion engendered by the discovery of the poison plot.

That Hamlet is frequently paralyzed by thought and unable to act effectively without the motive power of passion seems obvious enough. What is perhaps less obvious is the fact that most of his thought is directed in one way or another toward self-knowledge, which, for the Stoic sage is the basis of wisdom and virtuous activity. For the Renaissance Neostoics, as for the ancient Stoics, knowledge of self is joined with the knowledge of God. As La Primaudaye expresses it in *The French Academie*, "*. . . the perfect knowledge of ones selfe, which consisteth in the soule, is in such sort ioined with the knowledge of God that the one without the other cannot be sincere and perfect.*" These were the teachings of Socrates, and "Plato his disciple" added to these the concept of duty to one's fellow men as derivative from the other two imperatives: "*That the perfect dutie of man is, first to knowe his owne nature: then to contemplate the diuine nature: and last of all to bestow his labour in those things, which may be most beneficiall to all men.*"[19]

[19] *The French Academie* by Peter de la Primaudaye The third Edition and newly translated into English by T.B. (London: Geor. Bish. & Iohn Norton, 1594) Part I, p. 11. British Museum 8406 cc 17.

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In trying to arrive at the self-knowledge that will enable him to act effectively, Hamlet continually compares himself with various figures around him living and dead. Even the first soliloquy, which expresses mainly his loathing for Claudius and his disgust with Gertrude, seems to express as well a sense of his own inadequacy as he compares himself with the idealized heroic figure of his father: "My father's brother but no more like my father / Than I to Hercules . . . (1.2.152–3). On the battlements, just prior to the appearance of the ghost (1.4), he speaks in general terms of human corruptibility, but, as Olivier sensed, he seems to have in mind his own vulnerability to some unnamed "particular fault."

The process of comparison becomes more obvious in the second soliloquy as he is shamed by the example of an actor who can assume "in a fiction" the passion he himself should exhibit in life. He is shamed again later in the play by the example of young Fortinbras, whose reckless commitment to military glory for its own sake exhibits greatness as well as madness. He admires Laertes, "a very noble youth" who has acquired his code of honour from masters of known honour. And of course he admires and envies Horatio, measures himself against the standard of the Stoic sage Horatio represents. From Hamlet's point of view what these three young men have in common is that they are enviably secure in their conventionally determined roles. He himself cannot rest secure in any such role, any more than he can deliberately relinquish himself to an appropriate passion and play the role of avenger as it is conventionally conceived.

A Neostoic in the audience might notice that Hamlet's progress toward self-knowledge through the critical scrutiny of alternative roles and his refusal to fully assume or identify himself with any of them actually suggests the Senecan view of the sage as an actor. As Braden observes "... the good actor—who lives by his detachment from any of his roles, who understands that they are not real in themselves but only occasions to try his skill and who, knowing his script, moves in complete control through a situation he only pretends is risky—is a figure with many affinities to the Stoic sage."[20] The abundance of theatrical reference in *Hamlet* suggests that the play is making use of the Stoic commonplace that all the world's a stage to define Hamlet's progress toward self-knowledge in these terms.

In this connection, it is significant that the role he finally succeeds in assuming, for a time, is that of the sage. Virtually everyone notices how his mood has changed after his adventures at sea and how he is suddenly freed of the anxiety and self-recrimination he had repeatedly expressed prior to the voyage. The basis of his tranquillity appears to be his new-

[20] Braden, *Renaissance Tragedy*, 26.

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found trust in the benevolent design of providence which contrasts sharply with earlier reflections expressing his sense of being victimized by providence:

> The time is out of joint—O cursed spite,
> That ever I was born to set it right!
> (1.5.189–190)
>
> . . . For this same lord.
> I do repent; but heaven hath pleas'd it so
> To punish me with this, and this with me,
> That I must be their scourge and minister.
> (3.4.173–175)

The latter speech, uttered over the slain Polonius, can be read as a bitter acceptance of the fact that he has been victimized by providence, which has imposed upon him the damnable role of scourge. As conventionally conceived, the role of scourge and the role of minister are very different from each other and do not co-exist in the same actor. A scourge is a damned instrument of divine providence whose fitness for a damnable role is due to a corruption for which providence is not to blame. A minister is a benevolent agent of divine justice who may complete the work begun by a scourge, but the two agents are very different in kind.[21] In seeing himself as one coerced into assuming both roles, Hamlet is clearly rejecting any Christian or Stoic notion of providence as benevolent design. It is perhaps his most profoundly sceptical moment in the play. In his musing on the battlements (1.3.13–38) he had spoken of those who are victimized by nature and finally damned as a result of something "wherein they are not guilty." Now he describes himself as one victimized by heaven into assuming a role that will damn him.

Having accepted the role of scourge, Hamlet finds a model in Fortinbras, whose absurdly wasteful expedition exemplifies the enviably mindless state of one who has committed everything for the sake of honor itself. In his last soliloquy, Hamlet begins with reflections upon the godlike reason that sets a man apart from a beast and concludes with a vengeful "bloody" resolve befitting a scourge. In the lines between he castigates himself for his lack of action that cannot be explained any other way than by his "thinking too precisely on th'event." Obviously, however, we can gather from the fact that he is shamed by the spectacle of the army under Fortinbras, his thought is directed as much toward himself as toward the "event." Throughout the play it has become progres-

[21] For discussion of this point see Fredson Bowers, "Hamlet as Minister and Scourge," *PMLA* LXX (1955) 740–749.

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sively more apparent that Hamlet's introspection has led him not to the self-knowledge that should be the basis of virtuous activity but instead into a Montaignean *profond labyinthe* in which he moves ever further from an understanding of his own motives and therefore ever further from commitment to action. He is paralyzed by self-awareness, and the Stoic commonplace that self-knowedge leads to virtuous activity is obviously thrown into question. True, the soliloquy concludes with a vengeful "bloody" resolve, but it is voiced as a yearning to surrender wholly to passion, to emulate the mindless commitment of Fortinbras. It should also be noticed that he utters this bloody resolve while he is being conducted to England, and the prospect of being able to act on it is very remote indeed.

At this point in the play, Hamlet is the very antithesis of the Stoic sage. Nothing could be more antithetical to the ideal than his yearning to abandon himself to the urgings of his "blood." And his attitude toward the heaven that has victimized him with the roles of scourge and minister hardly approximates Stoic faith. Startling indeed, therefore, are his professions of Stoic faith in the next act, after his return from the sea voyage:

> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will—
>
> (5.2.10–11)

To which Horatio, recognizing an expression of his own Stoic faith, responds, "That is most certain." Hamlet's account of his adventures at sea reveals how he has arrived at Stoic faith, and with his arrival at faith has come a renewed sense of moral purpose:

> Does it not, think thee, stand me now upon—
> He hath kill'd my king, and whor'd my mother;
> Popp'd in between th'election and my hopes;
> Thrown out his angle for my proper life,
> And with such coz'nage—is't not perfect conscience
> To quit him with this arm? And is't not to be damn'd
> To let this canker of our nature come
> In further evil?
>
> (5.2.63–70)

There is obviously a great difference between this expression of resolve and those uttered earlier. He has now a clearly defined sense of his duty as a prince who is morally obliged to punish one who has killed his "king" and usurped the throne.

Faith and certainty of moral purpose are perhaps the most vital compo-

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nents enabling one to assume the role of Stoic sage. They are essential if one is to achieve *apatheia* and total resignation to fate. Hamlet's awareness of the role he is assuming is apparent in his profession of Christian Stoic faith in response to Horatio's offer to arrange an excuse for him to avoid the duel with Laertes (5.2.205–210). Horatio's offer comes in response to his admission of a foreboding, an anxiety that ill-befits a Stoic sage, but his profession of faith expresses perfect Christian Stoic trust in providence and resignation. He finds a kind of security, if not tranquillity, in this role he has finally managed to assume.

A Neostoic watching the final scene of the play might be heartened by the spectacle of a man sustained by faith in providence carrying out the duty which his sense of moral purpose prescribes. What a sceptic might point out to him, however, is that Hamlet's performance in the role of the sage is dramatically undercut by the scenes which frame it.

Hamlet's performance in the role of the Stoic sage is confined to the scene in Elsinore immediately preceding the duel. In the scene immediately preceding this, in the graveyard, he surrenders completely to his passions, and though his behavior toward Laertes is something he rightly repents (5.2.75–79), his exhibition of overwhelming grief over the death of Ophelia is clearly calculated to win him the sympathy of the audience which has been diminished by the spectacle of her suffering and the account of her miserable death. He is clearly incapable of the *apatheia* of the sage, and we must be aware of this even as we hear him perform the role of the sage before Horatio, but we are not made to think less of him because this awareness has been forced upon us in the graveyard scene. Nor are we likely to think less of him when he again surrenders completely to his passions as he kills Claudius. As noted earlier, there are ample grounds for believing that he could never carry out this necessary action without the motive power of overwhelming passion. The action itself may be in harmony with his stated sense of moral purpose and duty, but it is not performed as a sage would perform it.

The interesting question of whether or not a sage could execute blood vengeance without abandoning his moral purpose was being treated about this time by another dramastist, John Marston, in *Antonio's Revenge*. 'Marston's depiction of the Stoic Pandulpho's progress from sage to psychopath suggests that he agrees with Shakespeare that vengeful commitment is inherently corrupting, and one who so commits himself must inevitably abandon the role of the sage.[22] The question of how a sage would execute blood vengeance without abandoning his moral purpose remained unanswered on the stage until George Chapman

[22] See my article "Stoicism and Revenge in Marston," *English Studies* LI (1970), 507–517.

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provided *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* (1610). Clermont D'Ambois remains uncorrupted by destructive passion as he dispatches Montsurry and then commits suicide for the same reason Horatio attempts to kill himself, out of grief for the loss of a friend. Chapman seems to have had *Hamlet* in mind when he wrote *The Revenge*, was probably trying to improve upon it, and perhaps vindicate the Stoic ideal that *Hamlet* throws into question.[23]

For indeed as *Hamlet* concludes, we are left with a sceptical view of the ideal of the sage, a sense of ambivalence in the dramatic presentation that matches the ambivalence of Hamlet himself. It remains an admirable ideal, but the pressures of experience in Elsinore make it exceedingly difficult to sustain. This ambivalence, we might add, is in some ways typical of the age. In the works of Neostoic writers representing a very wide range of religious and philosophical outlooks—Lipsius, Du Vair, Mornay, La Primaudaye, Sir William Cornwallis the Younger, Thomas Lodge, Joseph Hall—to name a few, we may encounter the same admiration co-existing with profoundly critical attitudes that actually anticipate the anti-Stoic reaction that was to set in early in the seventeenth century. We might add further that while the treatment of Stoicism in *Hamlet* appears to be less critical than the treatments of it in other plays, notably *Julius Caesar* and *Troilus and Cressida*, it is in fact consistent with these plays in its questioning of some well known stoic assumptions. As noted earlier, the voice of Stoic wisdom in *Troilus and Cressida*, Agamemnon, uses Stoicism as a means of retreating from reality and evading responsibility. The characterization of Brutus in *Julius Caesar* could be viewed as a commentary on the Stoic doctrine preached by Epictetus and argued dramatically by Chapman in *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*, that a good man may reconcile virtually any form of well-intentioned world-cleansing activity with a correct moral purpose.[24] The "noblest Roman of them all" progresses toward a classical Stoic suicide with his moral purpose and his illusions intact, and Rome progresses toward yet another civil war with devastating moral consequences. Unlike Brutus and Agamemnon, Hamlet has a sense of the inadequacy of the role of the sage in a world that defies Stoic faith in its rationality, but this does not prevent him from attempting to assume this role.

[23] For discussion of how Chapman reconciles Stoicism with private revenge in this play see my article "The Unity of Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois*," *Pacific Coast Philology* IV (1969) 5–18.

[24] See Epictetus, *Discourses* IV. x. 1–3 & 10–13.

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The Fabric of the Universe Rent: *Hamlet* as an Inversion of *The Courtier**

BARBARA A. JOHNSON

Noting that "this Courtier hath long straid about this realme," Sir Thomas Hoby, in an epistle affixed to his translation of Castiglione's *The Courtier*, announces the significance of his undertaking for the English court:

> But nowe, though late in deede, yet for al that at length, beside his three principal languages, in the which he hath a long time haunted all the Courtes of Christendome, hee is beecome an Englishman . . . and welwilling to dwell in the Court of Englande, and in plight to tel his own cause.[1]

Equating the conduct manual with its desired end—the production of the perfect courtier—Hoby welcomes this new addition, expecting the accessibility of his translation to have an ennobling effect on court life in England. The descriptive subtitle, "Very Necessary and Profitable for Yonge Gentilmen and Gentilwomen Abiding in Court, Palaice, or Place," as well as the appendix (which contains "A Breef Rehersall of the Chiefe Conditions and Qualities in a Courtier" and "Of the Chief Conditions and Qualityes in a Waytyng Gentylwoman") testify as well to Hoby's radiant optimism in the efficacy of the work's prescriptive formulae for court behavior and appearance. It is worth asking, however, in what ways this influential book, the only work to escape Ascham's censure of Italian writings, "haunted" the courts of Europe and, specifically, of England.[2] One example of such a "haunting" can

*Paper read at the Hamlet Symposium of the University of Arkansas, 6 March 1987.

[1] Baldassare Castiglione, *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Sir Thomas Hoby, Tudor Translation Series, (London, 1900), p. 5. All further citations of *The Courtier* are to this translation (a reprint of the 1561 edition) with page numbers indicated parenthetically. The original work was published in Italy in 1528; Hoby's translation was first published in 1561 and reprinted in 1577, 1588, and 1603.

[2] For an examination of the influence of Castiglione's *Courtier* on England and on the Elizabethan court, see Daniel Javitch, "Rival Arts of Conduct in Elizabethan England: Guazzo's *Civile Conversation* and Castiglione's *Courtier*," *Yearbook of Italian Studies* I (1971), 178–198, and his fuller study, *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1978). Noting the immense popularity of Castiglione in England, Javitch points out that it is not until a decade after Hoby's translation in 1561 "that the currency of the book begins to be particularly notable" (*Poetry and Courtliness*, p. 4).

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perhaps be seen in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, which might be said to show what happens when the work becomes "an Englishman" and tells its "cause." But apart from the difficult and perhaps impossible problem of documenting direct influence, Castiglione's *Courtier* offers a way of assessing the world of the court in Shakespeare's tragedy and its effect on the central character.

My strategy in this essay, then, is to take *The Courtier* as a grid on which to plot corresponding elements in *Hamlet* in order to perceive the problems and possibilities of being a Renaissance man, artist, and ruler as these are refracted in the play. *The Courtier* offers us a fix on the world of *Hamlet*. That world can be summed up in two pictures, useful for the same purpose that Hamlet uses the contrasting portraits of his father and uncle—namely to point out a profound dissimilarity. In the first, Ophelia retrospectively evokes Hamlet's sterling qualities and, above all, his noble mind, now overthrown:

> The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword,
> Th'expectancy and rose of the fair state,
> The glass of fashion and the mould of form,
> Th'observ'd of all observers, quite, quite down!
> (3.1.153–156)[3]

In the second picture, we glimpse the courtier as jester. I refer to Yorick, or rather to his skull, to which Hamlet speaks this command: "Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come" (5.1.186–188). The skull has truly become the "mould" of form, but now with the pun on decay included. At this juncture, Hamlet knows Yorick and himself, as quintessences of dust, better than he did. What I wish to argue is that both *The Courtier* and *Hamlet* represent variations on the same theme; both describe what it means to be courtierlike, to be a court animal, to live at court. One does so in glowingly positive, the other in the basest possible, terms. Avoiding, then, the perennial issue of what disturbs Hamlet as an individual, I wish to stress his flawed context—his environment or court. Such an emphasis should, in turn, make it possible to reassess Hamlet's fundamental problem. What I shall argue is that Shakespeare's play presents a critique, almost a skeletal pattern or x-ray, of a world where the aesthetic and the political fuse.

Critics, of course, have linked *The Courtier* to a number of Shakespeare's works, *Hamlet* among them. W. B. Drayton Henderson, for example, asserts hyperbolically that "without Castiglione we should not have

[3] Harold Jenkins, ed., *Hamlet*, New Arden ed. (London: Methuen Press, 1982). All citations of *Hamlet* are from this edition.

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Hamlet," who is "the high exemplar" of "Castiglione's gift to the world."[4] Viewing Hamlet as a courtly and princely agent, Abbie Findlay Potts notes that the tragedy of *Hamlet*, like *Troilus and Cressida*, illustrates "a wide familiarity with courtly procedures," and that "The playwright's dramatic action is based squarely on the code of the courtier."[5] No one, however, has explored the precise relationship between the two texts. What I hope to demonstrate is that *Hamlet* represents an inversion, an upsidedown vision, indeed almost a parody, of *The Courtier* and so reveals the underside of Castiglione's ideal. It is therefore perfectly true that without *The Courtier* we should not have had *Hamlet*, but in a way other than Henderson understood the linkage.

Obviously, Castiglione sets out, quite purposefully, to erect a model.[6] The courtesy book claims to be a report of conversations that took place at the Court of Urbino within the space of four nights, although the author admits that he did not attend in person. Richard Lanham, however, notes that the text presents an "Urbino almost golden," and Joseph Mazzeo calls it a "kind of Utopia, or better, an Arcadia," where we find "a nostalgic vision of a perfect small society vitally concerned with the perfection of the self."[7] Although we often use the conduct manual as a valuable sourcebook for Renaissance ideas on various topics—for instance, on attitudes to language, love, women, and fortune, and such esoteric terms as *sprezzatura* (which Hoby translates as "Reckelesness to cover art" [p. 368])—the work sets out, strictly speaking, to define the chief conditions and qualities of the courtier and the courtly lady by means of dialogues that constitute court entertainment. These conversations are divided into four books corresponding to the four nights. Hoby describes the contents as follows:

> The first booke, entreateth of the perfect qualities of a Courtier.

[4] Henderson, "A Note on Castiglione and English Literature," Introduction to *The Book of the Courtier*, trans. Sir Thomas Hoby (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1928; rpt. 1956), p. xii. Henderson proceeds to list Hamlet's attributes with respect to Castiglione's ideal model of the courtier, pp. xii–xiv.

[5] A.F. Potts, *Shakespeare and The Faerie Queene* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1958), p. 104.

[6] For an interesting exploration of the way in which Castiglione's prescriptions for court conduct are determined by political pressures, see Daniel Javitch, "*Il Cortegiano* and the Constraints of Despotism," in *Castiglione: The Ideal and the Real in Renaissance Culture*, eds. Robert W. Hanning and David Ronsard (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 17–28.

[7] Richard Lanham, *The Motives of Eloquence: Literary Rhetoric in the Renaissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p. 145; Joseph Mazzeo, *Renaissance and Revolution: The Remaking of European Thought* (London: Methuen Press, 1967), p. 134.

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The second, of the use of them, and of merie
Jestes and Pranckes.
The thirde, of the condicions and qualities
of a waytinge Gentillwoman.
The fourth, of the end of a Courtier, and of
honest love.

(p.2)

Scattered throughout the four books amid the various interchanges between participants are a wealth of prescriptions, the most important of which Hoby conveniently lists in his appendix (pp. 368–377).[8] In the case of the male, these attributes are fairly predictable; to cite just a few, the courtier must be of noble birth, be physically well-proportioned, be amiable in countenance, be a good dresser (black or dark shades are stipulated), speak well, know classical and modern languages, exhibit a wide range of moral virtues, be skillful in manly exercises (such as fencing), and be able to sing, to play a musical instrument, to draw and paint. Above all, the courtier's chief accomplishment is to be an expert in martial feats, even if, as Hoby notes, "his understandinge be the lesse in all other thinges" (p. 370). These lesser attributes include being a lover and a scholar.

Only in the fourth book of *Il Courtegiano* does the discussion turn to the object of these attainments: as Hoby phrases it, "The final end of a Courtier, wher to [sic] al his good condicions and honest qualities tende, is to become an Instructer and Teacher of his Prince or Lorde, inclininge him to vertuous practises: and to be franke and free with him... alwayes putting him in minde to folow vertue and to flee vice..." (pp. 372–373). In recounting Castiglione's list of courtly desiderata, I of course anticipate the multiple facets of Hamlet's character. But I also wish to establish the Italian humanist's concept of the courtly self. This concept of identity is essentially aesthetic; it embodies the notion of the self as artifact. As Richard Lanham points out, the self embedded in Castiglione's dialogue is depicted as an aesthetic, not a moral, entity.[9] The implications of this emphasis emerge dramatically if we shift our notion of the courtier from Urbino to Elsinore, conceiving of the perfect courtier in the new setting—that is, in the recently decayed or "rotten" state of Denmark.

That Hamlet is—or at least *was*—the perfect courtier we know from Ophelia's speech (3.1.153–156). He is courtier, soldier, and scholar; and his eye (his power of observation and perhaps his comeliness), his

[8] In this essay, all rules pertaining to court behavior and appearance, unless otherwise noted, are taken from this appendix.
[9] Lanham (n. 7 above), p. 156.

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tongue (his ability to speak fairly), and his sword, (the means by which he performs martial feats) are specifically named. But we ought also to notice that Ophelia's speech links the political and the aesthetic qualities of the prince: he is "Th'expectancy and rose of the fair state" as well as "The glass of fashion and the mould of form." Her speech also describes, succinctly, the world Hamlet inhabits, a world in which the prince is constantly being observed (the tragedy repeatedly underscores spying). It is Hamlet himself who is more "observed" than others, but he too is a studious observer, ever watching the behavior that surrounds him the better to determine whom he can trust. The most salient point about Ophelia's speech, however, is that her would-be lover is now "quite, quite down"; indeed, he appears to be as "out of joint" (1.5.196) as his world.

Hamlet's declaration that "The time is out of joint" occurs immediately after the Ghost reveals that his father-king has been murdered by the "serpent" who now reigns, as though fratricide had dislocated his personal world and the greater realm of Denmark at a single stroke. Yet Hamlet's behavior in the first court scene, before he knows of the crime, already registers his sense of isolation at court. Here, the isolation appears to stem from excessive grief for the loss of his father; but such mourning does not really explain his very uncourtierlike deportment to the king when we first encounter him. Although Ophelia claims that Hamlet is the embodiment of the ideal courtier, her statement, strictly speaking, applies only to the character before the action begins. Hamlet violates several of Castiglione's precepts in this first court scene. *The Courtier* enjoins the would-be courtier "Not to be ill tunged, especiallie against his betters" (p. 369), "Not to use any fonde saucinesse or presumption" (p. 369), "To use evermore toward his Prince or L[ord] the respect that beecommeth the servaunt toward his maister" (p. 372), and especially "Never to be sad, melanchonie [sic] or solenn [sic] beefore hys Prince" (p. 372). Claudius, in his capacity as king, rather than uncle, recognizes Hamlet's insubordination. When he first turns to Hamlet, he begins, "But now, my cousin Hamlet, and my son—" (1.2.64), later, however, closing his interchange with his nephew by subtly reminding him of his duties as a courtier: "Our chiefest *courtier*, cousin, and our son" (1.2.117; italics added). Hamlet's insubordination, his rejection of his duties as "chiefest courtier," may be explained not merely as sorrow for the loss of a father, but also as his grief for the loss of a sovereign.

In the very act of violating several of Castiglion'e particularized courtly tenets, Hamlet obeys a higher imperative from the same tradition: "Not to waite upon or serve a wycked and naughtye person" (p. 372). Castiglione, of course, never addresses the possibility that in a properly hierarchical

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and idealized universe a wicked person could ever become king, for he has his conversationalists stress the point that a good prince is necessarily a "Demy God" in a discussion on how to govern in Book Four (pp. 314–315).[10] And in fact, when the ceremonial scene of the royal audience dissolves, Shakespeare leaves Hamlet alone to ponder the very possibility that Castiglione omits to consider—the incongruity between the rightful king and a usurper—in precisely these godlike terms: "So excellent a king, that was to this / Hyperion to a satyr..." (1.2.139–140). For old Hamlet, whose ghost Hamlet had addressed as "King, father, royal Dane" (1.4.45), was everything a ruler should be; and Hamlet, in his interview with his mother, elaborates the point in a proliferation of godly images: "Hyperion's curls, the front of Jove himself, / An eye like Mars to threaten and command" (3.4.56–57). "That it should come to this!" (1.2.137), Hamlet exclaims, after the first court scene, for it seems as impossible to the idealistic prince, as it was to Castiglione, that evil should lay claim to the throne.

But Hamlet's reflections on the disparity between the trappings of majesty and the king's inner worth surface, albeit obliquely, in our first sight of the prince. Asked why his grief "seems" particular to him , he vehemently insists that he knows not "seems." Suits, sighs, and tears are but the trappings of woe; "forms," moods," and "shapes of grief," all externally observed, cannot represent him truly, for that which is within "passes show" (1.2.76–86). Like so many other Renaissance texts, *The Courtier* raises the philosophical problem of how we differentiate between what *seems*—that is, external behavior—and what *is*, the inner truth or reality about human beings. In the context of their stated aim to fashion the perfect courtier, the conversationalists at Urbino discuss how one may distinguish " thinges good in dede, from suche as appeare good," and whether "outwarde matters" are a "token of the inwarde" (pp. 130, 135).

Castiglione does not resolve this question definitively, and, even then, not to the satisfaction of all, until the fourth and last section, where the discussants take up the issue of whether beauty in women can mask evil within. Pietro Bembo dismisses the possibility by invoking a Neoplatonic dictum: "Beleave not (quoth he) but beautie is alwayes good" (p. 348). Bembo, of course, conceives of beauty as a divine abstraction, but he goes on to develop it in terms of physical being—terms which document the Renaissance notion of aesthetically conceived human

[10] Lord Octavian is speaking: "finallye he shall be moste glorious and moste deerlye beloved both to God and manne: throughe whose grace he shall attéine unto that heroicall and noble vertue, that shall make him passe the boundes of the nature of manne, and shall rather be called a Demy God, then a manne mortall" (p. 314).

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beings: "Therfore it maye be said that Beawtie is a face pleasant, meerie, comelye, and to be desired for goodnesse: and Foulness a face darke, uglesome, unpleasant and to be shonned for yll" (p. 349). In the case of *Hamlet*, both the prince and the play proclaim the very reverse. After all, in bitter reaction to the Ghost's revelation, Hamlet writes on his "tables": "That one may smile, and smilè, and be a villain—/ At least I am sure it may be so in Denmark" (1.5.108–109).

I need hardly belabor the point that whether external signs reflect interior states is a question that reverberates throughout the play. The relationship between outward behavior and inner reality surfaces, for example, in Claudius's reference to Hamlet's transformation: "Sith nor th'exterior nor the inward man/Resembles that it was" (2.2.6–7). Shakespeare explores the ramifications of the problem in Hamlet's encounter with the players, where the actor's ability to mimic genuine emotion in the form of feigned tears points up the discrepancy for Hamlet between his own motives and actions. The issue returns, now more terrifyingly, in Hamlet's fears about the Ghost: "the devil hath power/ T'assume a pleasing shape... "(2.2.595–596). And a corollary problem—whether good can come from external signs that do not reflect external truth, or (to put it more simply) whether the end (diagnosing Hamlet's problem) justifies the means (feigning)—emerges when Polonius sets the stage for the nunnery scene by putting a devotional book into Ophelia's hands:

> We are oft to blame in this,
> 'Tis too much prov'd, that with devotion's visage
> And pious action we do sugar o'er
> The devil himself.
>
> (3.1.46–49)

Ironically, even though Polonius intends no rebuke, Claudius nonetheless feels the sting of his counsellor's maxim just before this particular piece of staging begins:

> How smart a lash that speech doth give my conscience.
> The harlot's cheek, beautied with plast'ring art,
> Is not more ugly to the thing that helps it
> Than is my deed to my most painted word.
>
> (3.1. 50–53)

As Harold Jenkins has noted, the "harlot's plast'ring art" and women's use of cosmetics generally, described in the Renaissance as women's "painting," "is a standard object of Elizabethan satire";[11] but the presence

[11] Jenkins, ed., *Hamlet*, p. 277, n. 51.

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of the subject here, and elsewhere in the play, is significant. It emerges as a kind of symbolic shorthand for the evil Hamlet sees everywherre in his courtly world. In this scene, where he is probably feigning madness, but where his "words, words, words" may mean more than an "act," he says to Ophelia: "I have heard of your paintings well enough. God hath given you one face and you make yourselves another" (3.1.144–146). For Hamlet, court behavior is like woman's cosmetics; it hides a baser nature. Claudius himself sees his "painted words," the speech of a king, as masking the ugly crime of fratricide. In the passage just cited he describes himself as a harlot. The symbolism of women's "painting" emerges again, in a more profound context, when Hamlet imagines Yorick's skull lessoning Gertrude in "my lady's chamber": "let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come" (5.1.187–188). By extension, the reference may also apply to Ophelia; if so, it would add the additional irony that the younger lady has already come to this "favour" or complexion of death, although Hamlet does not yet know it. More importantly, the pervasive emblem of "women's painting" undergoes a stunning development in this scene: flesh emerges as the "paint" that disguises the true reality of our mortal being. Thus, "painting," or the artistic embellishment of identity—the notion of the self as a beautiful artifact—undergoes an increasingly mordant critique as the play unfolds.

But if Shakespeare employs "women's painting" as a minor symbol of what afflicts Hamlet, the playwright uses acting as his major one. Charles R. Forker and others have conclusively domonstrated the centrality of theatrical symbolism in *Hamlet*. Forker notes that the work represents a "chain of 'playings,' "[12] and that "The idea of theatre . . . embodies one of the mysterious paradoxes of tragedy, the impingement of appearance and reality upon each other."[13] Hence, the theatrical symbolism, epitomized by Hamlet's reaction to the Player's speech, is entirely appropriate to the evil explored in the play. But there is another reason why Shakespeare's play is dominated by the metaphor of the theatre: to be a courtier is to "act" perpetually. The world that Castiglione envisions, a world where the courtier is an artifact, requires thespian skills, as the following principle from *Il Courtegiano*, spoken by Sir Frederick, a distinguished courtier and diplomat, makes clear:

> Therefore will I have our Courtyer in that he doeth or saieth to use certaine general rules. . . . And for the first and chief lette him avoid (as the Count saide wel in that behalf yester night) above all

[12] Charles R. Forker, "Shakespeare's Theatrical Symbolism and its Function in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 14 (1963), 222.
[13] Ibid., p. 217.

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thinges curiositie [affectation). Afterwarde let him consider wel what the thing is he doth or speaketh, the place wher it is done, in presence of whom, in what time, the cause why he doeth it, his age, his profession, the ende whereto it tendeth, and the meanes that may bring him to it: and so let him apply himselfe discreatly with these advertisementes to whatsoever he mindeth to doe or speake.[14]

(p. 112)

In the golden world of Urbino, this rule simply represents the highest awareness one can have of one's duty to be an aesthetic entity; but Elsinore exposes the problematic nature of Castiglione's courtly ideal. Only Hamlet himself can be seen as exemplifying this model and even he, given the disruptions that have occurred in his world, cannot believe in it. He sees himself as a sinner in the nunnery scene: "I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious, with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in" (3.1.124–127). His statement underscores both his situation and his acknowledgement that "acting" itself, which is a requirement of the courtier, masks the latent evil within all the members of the court, even himself.

One register of the play's obsessive attention to the court and to court behavior can be seen in the descending hierarchy of courtiers that *Hamlet* presents. Hamlet occupies the top of the scale and Osric the bottom, while the middle gradations encompass the figures of Horatio, Laertes, Polonius, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern. Hamlet himself, significantly, makes a pronouncement on each figure—a measure, incidentally, of how the court has contributed to his dilemma.

Horatio, in the world of this play, hardly seems a courtier at all. He fulfills one of Castiglione's precepts for the would-be courtier: "To get him[self] an especialle and hartye friend to companye withall" (p. 369). A telling illustration of Horatio's status as a non-courtier is his witnessing of the Ghost, which, as he notes, may portend an eruption to the state, but which he then resolves to inform Hamlet about rather than the head of state, brother to the apparition. His loyalty is to Hamlet alone, not to the kingdom. The prince pays Horatio a better compliment than to call him "courtier": "Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man / As e'er my conversation cop'd withal" (3.2.54–55). And it is important that, in Hamlet's mind, this declaration of love must be separated from the general disease of the court (flattery) and its object (gain):

[14] Hoby abbreviates this principle in the appendix and places it at the end of the long list of the chief conditions and qualities and before his definition of the final end of the courtier: "To consyder well what it is that he doeth or speaketh, where, in presence of whom, what time, why, his age, his profession, the ende, and the meanes" (p. 372).

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Nay, do not think I flatter,
For what advancement may I hope from thee
That no revenue has but thy good spirits
To feed and clothe thee? Why should the poor be flatter'd?
No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp,
And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee
Where thrift may follow fawning. . . .
(3.2.56–62)

Unlike most of the figures in Hamlet's world, Horatio can be counted on; his internal state is not at odds with his outward behavior. Thus, Hamlet announces that he will "wear" the man who is not "passion's slave" "In my heart's core, ay, in my heart of heart" (3.2.73). This statement, with its odd notion of "wearing" a friend, looks back to the first scene in which we encounter Hamlet, where he refers to the "suits," "the trappings of woe"; for in this fresh interiorized sense of clothing, Hamlet substitutes his former ideal of courtiership for a deeper one, and Horatio exemplifies the new model.

As we move down the scale, Hamlet's commentary on the courtiers at Elsinore becomes increasingly contemptuous, but in the case of Laertes, at least, the prince tempers his scorn. It is Laertes who embodies what Claudius approves of in a courtier's behavior. The king's handling of the shallow young man in the first court scene is designed to provoke Hamlet. The repetition of Laertes' name (1.2.42–50) and the assertion that any request will be granted ("The head is not more native to the heart, / The hand more instrumental to the mouth, / Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father" [1.2.47–49]) are statements designed for Hamlet's edification. The message is unmistakeable: those close to the throne, provided they exhibit proper deference, will receive favor. But Laertes himself is a skillful player of the courtly game; he claims that he has returned to Denmark to show his duty in the king's coronation. Contrastingly, Horatio tells Hamlet that he returned for his father's funeral. When we next see Laertes (directly after the ceremonial occasion) both his advice to his sister and his demeanor before his father underscore the duplicity of his nature. In speaking to Ophelia, he shows himself aware that affairs of state must inevitably take precedence over personal desires. Hamlet is "subject to his birth," for "The sanity and health of this whole state" depend on his choice of a wife (1.3.18–21). When Polonius appears, the youth reacts instinctively, telling Ophelia, "I stay too long" (1.3.51); but he recovers immediately, donning the cloak of loving son: "But here my father comes. / A double blessing is a double grace" (1.3.52–53).

We get a glimpse of Laertes' life in France through Polonius s instruc-

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tions to Reynaldo to spy upon him. Polonius expects a certain wildness—gaming, drinking, fencing, swearing, and incontinency, for instance. In short, he anticipates that Laertes will cut a wordly figure, like the swashbuckler he enacts when he discovers that his father has been murdered. Unlike Hamlet, the son of Polonius acts out all the passions that can be expected of a hot-headed youth in such a situation. Significantly, Claudius asks Laertes, after he has burst into the palace, whether his rash behavior is a sign of his inner state: "Laertes, was your father dear to you? / Or are you like the painting of a sorrow, / A face without a heart?" (4.7.106–108). Claudius's rephrasing of the question yokes Laertes and Hamlet together: "what would you undertake / To show yourself in deed your father's son / More than in words?" (4.7.123–125). Hamlet himself recognizes his greater resemblance to Laertes than to Horatio, for both he and Laertes are "passion's slaves," as the theatricality of their behavior at Ophelia's grave makes obvious. Hamlet regrets this incident, noting that he sees in the portraiture of Laertes' cause the image of his own; yet he admits that Laertes' ostentatious behavior, "the bravery of his grief," had put him "Into a tow'ring passion" (5.2.79–80). Nonetheless, Hamlet resolves to "court" his adversary—a recognition that the skills of the courtier, especially speech, can paint over situations; and Shakespeare gives us an apt illustration in the prince's speech to Laertes before the fencing match. Hamlet makes an adroit public apology that exculpates his earlier failure of self-control by claiming madness to be the true enemy.

No charity surfaces in Hamlet's dealings with Polonius. Castiglione's courtesy book comments on aged courtiers in Book Two: "And old men for al they are ordinarily wiser then yong men, more continent, and of a better foresight, yet are they withall more lavish in wordes, more greedie, harder to please, more fearfull, alwayes chafying in the house, sharpe to their children, and will have every man wedded to their will" (p. 120). Shakespeare has invested his old courtier with many of these negative traits, but he has Hamlet reject the more positive ones, such as foresight and wisdom, in his final pronouncement on the king's chief advisor:

> This counsellor
> Is now most still, most secret, and most grave,
> Who was in life a foolish prating knave.
> (3.4.215–217)

It is not only Polonius's foolishness, his prattling, that the play underlines, but also the methods that the old man uses to achieve his ends. As already noted, he uses indirection to find direction out, which involves

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the gathering of intelligence on his own son. There is also his insistence that he alone knows the reason for Hamlet's madness, which, as he claims, stems from Ophelia's spurning of the prince. This detail is revealing, given Castiglione's observation (in the fourth book) that old courtiers care only about "honest love" that discards the sensual and uses the beauty of women to ascend the Neoplatonic ladder of love. But it is especially Polonius's perception of his importance as the king's counsellor—a perception the validity of which it never occurs to him to question—that defines his shortcomings:

> My liege and madam, to expostulate
> What majesty should be, what duty is,
> Why day is day, night night, and time is time,
> Were nothing but to waste night, day, and time.
> (2.2.86–89)

Shakespeare so debases the status of Polonius in the play that the character seems to forecast Osric's behavior; for the old man's sycophantic willingness to let the cloud become whatever Hamlet wants it to be—a camel, weasel, or whale in 3.2—already suggests the comic pliability of the fop of Act 5. And, accordingly, we ask, is he merely humoring a madman here, or does his slavish devotion to rank explain the supine yielding?

Hamlet's despair about the deteriorating state of courtiership at Elsinore deepens as we move further down the scale. Just before the satiric exchange with Polonius, Hamlet has exposed Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as spies for the king: "though you fret me, you cannot play upon me" (3.2.362–363). These courtiers were once his childhood friends, but their devotion to majesty has now loosened those bonds as well as obliterated their individuality, for we cannot distinguish between them. The only salient feature Shakespeare shows us is their ambition, which they disclose by interpreting Hamlet's madness in terms of their own goals—goals defined by their own sociopolitical frustration. Thus, Hamlet plays to their preconceptions when, in response to a direct question from Rosencrantz, he answers, "Sir, I lack advancement" (3.2.331). Noting their slavishness to power, Hamlet calls them sponges because they soak

> up the King's countenance, his rewards, his authorities. But such officers do the King best service in the end: he keeps them, like an ape, in the corner of his jaw—first mouthed, to be last swallowed. When he needs what you have gleaned, it is but squeezing you and, sponge, you shall be dry again.
> (4.2.14–20)

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Hamlet's final bitter comment on the twin sycophants occurs in his justification to Horatio for their death: "Why, man, they did make love to this employment" (5.2.57). What distresses the prince most is that men of "baser nature" (5.2.60), perversions of the courtly ideal, thrive all too sucessfully at the court of Elsinore.

Osric, of course, is the most conspicuous example of the pattern I have been tracing; but even more telling is the circumstance that Hamlet's encounter with him performs no structural function in the plot. Towards the close of the scene in which we first meet Osric, after he departs, a Lord enters to inquire whether Hamlet is ready for the fencing match. Although the mechanics of the drama do not require Osric, it seems likely that Shakespeare, by means of this apparently superfluous episode, wished to heighten the idea of debased courtiership near the denouement of the tragedy. Here, with Horatio appropriately present as audience, Hamlet "frets" and "plays" upon Osric, exposing him as the lowest possible form of court life, a "waterfly" (5.2.82–83). Osric sports all the required trappings of a courtier, the powerful status conferred by land (5.2.86), a "purse" filled with "golden words" that he "spends" to impress his betters (5.2.129–30), and exquisite finery (represented by his hat) to ornament and display through gesture his verbal accomplishments. He is naturally impressed by the material goods involved in the king's wager, but the dashing figure of Laertes especially enraptures him. In the following speech, Osric typically fastens upon appearance:

> Sir, here is newly come to court Laertes—believe me, an absolute gentleman, full of most excellent differences, of very soft society and great *showing*. Indeed, to speak feelingly of him, he is the *card* or *calendar* of gentry; for you shall find in him the continent of what part a gentleman *would see*.
>
> (5.2.106–111; italics added)

Surface appearances, pleasing manners, and later in the conversation, the right weapons—in short, aesthetic considerations, rather than interior worth—define the perfect courtier for Osric. Hamlet responds in kind to this speech, adopting the empty style of the lordling, the better to rebuke his shallowness. After Osric departs, Hamlet comments on the significance of what he represents:

> Thus has he—and many more of the same bevy that I know the drossy age dotes on—only got the tune of the time and, out of an habit of encounter, a kind of yeasty collection, which carries them through and through the most fanned and winnowed opinions; and do but blow them to their trial, the bubbles are out.
>
> (5.2.184–191)

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Osric is simply one additional indicator of the debased nature of the times. In the previous scene, Hamlet had noted the same affectation in the gravedigger, who had imitated the language of the courtier: "By the Lord, Horatio, this three years I have took note of it, the age is grown so picked that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier he galls his kibe" (5.1.134–138). Even more telling in this scene are the labels Hamlet attaches to the skulls that are thrown up in the process of digging. The first is either the "pate of a politician" or a "courtier"; the second he imagines to be that of a lawyer. Hamlet's choices are apt, for the three possibilities represent the machinery of Renaissance bureaucracy.

Shakespeare's descending hierarchy of courtiers in the play comprises a set of signals to suggest that when the head of state is tainted, infection spreads downward to the merest fledglings. Hamlet, of course, remains relatively uncorrupted by this particular disease, but he has not pledged his allegiance to King Claudius. Nevertheless, he is forced, because of the depraved environment, to abandon some of his training as a courtier in order to save himself. In 5.2, Hamlet reports his actions aboard the ship to Horatio, thus documenting his necessity to unlearn several of the principal tenets of courtiership. This narrative is laced with reflections on how unlike himself he had to be in order to survive the intended treachery. He begins by confessing to rashness and indiscretion in stealing the king's commission, nevertheless observing that "Our indiscretion sometime serves us well." Opening the commission requires boldness and the foregetting of "manners." Now he discovers "royal knavery," his death sentence wrapped in the language of state. His only recourse is to answer this "royal knavery" in kind. He therefore sits down to pen another commission, writing it "fair," after which he ponders the significance of clerkly penmanship to Horatio:

> I once did hold it, as our statists do,
> A baseness to write fair, and labour'd much
> How to forget that learning, but, sir, now
> It did me yeoman's service.

Here Hamlet considers the good effects of abandoning his training as a courtier-prince in order to save his own life. In a final bit of deception, he employs his father's signet ring to seal a death warrant, again wrapping his own stratagem in the language of state, this time to rid the courtly world of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

An important precept of *The Courtier*, contained in Hoby's appendix, provides a gloss on the ramifications of Hamlet's deed: the proper servant of the court is "Not to folowe his owne fansie, or alter the expresse wordes in any point of his commission from hys Prince or Lorde, onlesse he be assured that the profit will be more, in case it have good successe,

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then the damage, if it succeade yll" (p. 372). Having learned a valuable lesson in courtliness, Hamlet writes to Claudius, properly addressing the king as "High and mighty" and referring to his "kingly eyes" while ironically the courtly style serves a falsehood (4.7.42–45). But a further irony of the tragedy goes deeper still, for, having learned to jettison aspects of himself in terms of his courtly training in order to save his life, Hamlet fails to see another bit of "royal knavery," cloaked in the most courtly of activities—a fencing match—at the close of the play. Little wonder that Hamlet enjoins Horatio to absent himself "from felicity awhile / And in this harsh world draw [his] breath in pain / To tell [the prince's] story" (5.2.352–354). The story is, of course, one consequence of *The Courtier's* becoming "an Englishman," and, Hamlet's plea "To tell my story" provides an ironic counterpoint to the translator's hope that his translation could tell its "cause." *Hamlet* is the story of the perfect courtier in an imperfect world.

It is clear, then, leaving aside the question of Castiglione's direct influence on the composition of Shakespeare's play, that *Hamlet* is indeed "haunted" by both the idealized model of the courtier in *Il Courtegiano* and the consequences of its translation into the seamy world of court politics. What might account for *Hamlet's* bitter critique of courtliness? Daniel Javitch, in *Poetry and Courtliness in Renaissance England*, notes that a few years after Sir Philip Sidney's death, a certain disillusionment set in. There appeared in the literature to be "a marked decline in the belief that courtiers could live up to the model roles Castiglione and others had imagined."[15] Supplying a partial explanation, Javitch links this decay of idealism to the decline in reputation of Elizabeth's court in the 1590s because of the generational turnover.[16] Moreover, Castiglione's yardstick of courtesy at this period seemed to fall out of favor, giving place to rival codes of conduct:

> [*The Courtier*] continues to be read and to be admired. But already at the end of Elizabeth's reign its authority is challenged by new courtesy books, devoted to fashioning polite gentlemen acting in society at large rather than courtiers. In *The Courtier's* most notable rival, Stephano Guazzo's *Civil Conversation* (translated into English as early as 1581), the civil and honest behavior recommended often defies courtly notions of politeness. The anticourtly bias in Guazzo's handbook, its open criticism of dissimulation, ornamentation, and dilettantism, stems

[15] Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness* (n. 2 above), p. 125.

[16] Ibid., p. 125. Javitch's discussion relies heavily on an article by J.E. Neale, "The Elizabethan Political Scene," British Academy Raleigh Lecture, 1948, rpt. in *Essays in Elizabethan History*, (London, 1958), and on Lawrence Stone's *The Crisis of the Aristocracy, 1558–1641* (Oxford, 1965), as well as on other works.

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from the author's awareness that many of the beautiful tactics recommended in court conduct were all too prone, in actual practice, to lapse into shallowness and fraud.[17]

Guazzo's conduct book appears to provide a diagnosis of the problematic nature of Castiglione's model of the courtier and may partly account for the playwright's obsession with the debasement of the courtly ideal in *Hamlet*.

Before we turn to the final correspondence between Shakespeare and Castiglione, one further aspect of the relationship between *The Courtier* and *Hamlet* must be addressed. Scholars have noted a link, perhaps fortuitous, between an incident at the court of Urbino in 1538 and the crime in Shakespeare's play, doubly represented by the Ghost's account of old Hamlet's poisoning and by *The Murder of Gonzago*. One C. Elliot Browne in 1876 had claimed that the "story of the Play is certainly taken from the murder of the Duke or Urbano [sic] by Luigi Gonzaga . . . [he is alleged to have bribed a barber to do the murder] who was poisoned by means of a lotion poured into his ears."[18] Appropriately, Bullough admits that "We do not know how far Shakespeare drew upon the *Ur-Hamlet* for the method of old Hamlet's murder and the play-within-the-play, but Shakespeare's *Hamlet* combines with the Amleth story material taken from the circumstances surrounding the death of Guidobaldi I's nephew and successor."[19] Guidobaldi I actually presided over the court of Urbino and was said to be too ill to be a participant in Castiglione's dialogues. His wife, Elisabetta Gonzaga, did preside over the courtly entertainment. Guidobaldi's grandson, the murdered duke (his official title was Duke Francesco Marie I della Rovere [1490–1538]) also figures as one of Castiglione's conversationalists—as the Lord General who energetically comes in during the first night. There appear also to be additional links. Bullough for instance notes that the details of the appearance and dress of Hamlet's father in *Hamlet* probably derive from the murdered duke's portrait by Titian.[20] But why should Shakespeare have any interest in embedding the details of the duke's 1538 murder in *Hamlet*, apart from sensationalism?[21] The matter is purely speculative,

[17] Javitch, *Poetry and Courtliness*, (n. 2 above), p. 131.
[18] Quoted in Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957–1975), VII, 30.
[19] Ibid., p. 31
[20] Ibid., p. 33. Bullough here suggests additional parallels and connections involving Q1 and Q2.
[21] Bullough speculates that the change from the murder at a banquet in the original plot to the "Italianate secret way of poison" probably occurred at the stage of the *Ur-Hamlet* (p. 28).

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but if the dramatist were offering an implicit criticism of *The Courtier* and, specifically, of Castiglione's optimistic vision of the court of Urbino, he might well have been thinking of the introduction to Book Four.

The Courtier, like *Hamlet*, contains a meditation on death. Before the festivities of the fourth night are reported, Castiglione ponders the list of participants who have already died: "It causeth me therfore to remember that not long after these reasoninges were had, cruell death bereved our house of three most rare gentilmen, whan in their prosperous age and forwardnesse of honour they most flourished..." (p. 293). He consoles himself by noting that "there never issued out of the horse of Troy so many great men and capitaines . . . (p. 294); then he lists several, ending with the full name of the Lord General, who had been made duke by the time he was writing his report of the courtly dialogues in *The Courtier*. His grief assuaged, Castiglione concludes his meditation on mortality as follows:

> Therefore (me thinke) whether it be by happe, or throughe the favour of the sterres the same cause that so longe a time hath graunted unto Urbin verie good governours, doth still continue and bringeth furth [sic] the like effectes. And therefore it is to be hoped that prosperous fortune will still encrease these so vertuous doinges, that the happines of the house and of the State shall not only not diminish, but rather daily encrease. . . .
>
> (p. 295)

The violent and ignoble end of the Duke of Urbino, who had signalled such promise in Castiglione's eyes, might be pregnantly suggestive to a playwright who had partially defined his agenda in *Hamlet* as anatomizing both courts and courtiers against the very models provided by Castiglione's conduct manual.

But the play's design upon its audience extends well beyond exposing the real life consequences of Castiglione's view of the model courtier and the model court. Shakespeare broods about more than political realities in *Hamlet*; he is re-envisioning the conventional view of the universe and human nature. A final correspondence between *The Courtier* and *Hamlet* may therefore be mentioned in this respect. I refer to perhaps the most famous passage of *The Courtier*—Pietro Bembo's Neoplatonic discourse on beauty.

In Book Four, the cardinal directs our attention to the fabric of the universe and to the figure of man as dual proofs that beauty is always good and has a "comely face." Bembo first points to the universe: "Behoulde the state of this great Inginn of the world, which God created for the helth and preservation of every thing that was made" (p. 349). He proceeds to

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elaborate on this statement, drawing attention to the perfect order of the heavens, the earth, the sun, and the moon. Bembo concludes: "These thinges emong them selves have such force by the knitting together of an order so necessarilye framed, that with altering them any one jott, they shoulde all be lewsed, and the worlde would decaye" (p. 349). I need hardly emphasize that images of decay and corruption are everywhere present in Shakespeare's play; but what is truly significant here is Bembo's explanation of the cause for the decay—an alteration that would disrupt the knitted order, the very fabric of the universe. Just such an image of a profoundly changed universe can be found in Hamlet's statement, "The time is out of joint. O cursed spite, / That ever I was born to set it right" (1.5.171–172), after he has discovered that his father has been murdered. Significantly, similar imagery surfaces in the first court scene and provides an unambiguous signal, in retrospect, that things are indeed "out of joint." Claudius calls Gertrude "Th'imperial *jointress* to this warlike state," and in noting Fortinbras's impending campaign, the king remarks that the impetuous youth has perceived "Our state to be *disjoint* or *out of frame*" (2.2.9, 20; italics added).

The central alteration of the tragedy, the crime of fratricide, is compounded by the substitution of an evil king for a good one and the incestuous marriage. All these circumstances have brought about the decay of the state and the court. Hamlet's inner world and the greater world of the state are "out of joint" because the fabric of the universe, the "knitted order," has been rent by the "cess" of true majesty, by the old king's death. The decay of the court at Elsinore and the rotten nature of the state are the lamentable result. Hamlet's "What piece of work is a man" speech signals his changed perspective of the universe. "This goodly frame the earth" has become for him a "sterile promontory"; "the brave o'erhanging firmament," "the majestical roof fretted with golden fire," has been redefined as a "foul and pestilent congregation of vapors" (2.2.298–303).

Bembo, having evoked the example of the universe as proof that beauty is good, next turns to the figure of man: "Thinke now of the shape of man, which may be called a little world: in whom every percell of his body is seene to be necessarily framed by art and not by happ," so that "the fourme [is] all together most beawtifull..." (pp. 349–350). For Hamlet, however, this "piece of work," this aesthetic entity, who is "noble in reason," "infinite in faculties," in form and moving "express and admirable," in action "like an angel," in apprehension "like a god"—and consequently the "beauty of the world" and the "paragon of animals"—reduces to a demoralizing "quintessence of dust" (2.2.303–308). Bembo's rapturous vision of the Neoplatonic ascent to heaven metamor-

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phoses under Shakespeare's tragic dramaturgy to Hamlet's more negative assessment in the nunnery scene: "What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven?" (3.1.128–129). All roads in *Hamlet* lead to that graveyard of Act 5, where flesh (the paint) is stripped away and where our mortality is revealed in all its horror and putrescence. Probably no one can say whether Shakespeare consciously presented an inversion of *The Courtier* in his most popular play; but, in his use of the notion of courtiership to strip away the layers of human deception, he managed to reduce all our pretensions, all our preconceptions about identity, to a skull.

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"The King my father?": Paternity in *Hamlet*

ALISON G. HAYTON

Legitimacy and illegitimacy are important antitheses in *Hamlet*. The heart of their effect in the play lies in the opposing paternities which are offered to the protagonist by the two king-father figures, King Hamlet, and Claudius. Hamlet's ambiguous status as 'son' to the ghost, and to the present king, gives a key to his changeable behaviour in the play. Whether he believes in his legitimacy or his illegitimacy dictates his actions, and his attitude to other characters.

To which figure he should act as son is important to him, for in accepting the paternity of either the ghost or Claudius, Hamlet accepts a course of action and a set of values related to that state. To be the legitimate son of the dead king puts him out of joint with the present world of corruption in the Danish court, and forces him to follow the ghost's call for revenge to destroy that world. To accept Claudius as his father, either literally or figuratively, and the inheritance of the throne in the new regime, would be to ally himself with an illegitimate set of values, to declare himself a bastard by ignoring the ghost.

Laertes, anxious to avenge Polonius's death, proclaims

> That drop of blood that's calm proclaims me bastard,
> Cries cuckold to my father, brands the harlot
> Even here between the chaste unsmirched brow
> Of my true mother.
>
> (4.5.117)[1]

and Hamlet's delay suggests that he has such illegitimate drops of blood in his veins. His preoccupation with the details of his mother's adulterous relationship with Claudius, and with the illegitimate nature of the court world around him, distracts Hamlet from his revenge task.

The presence of King Hamlet as a figure of legitimate values is felt strongly in the Danish court, however; nowhere more strongly than in the mind of Hamlet. King Hamlet was, Hamlet feels, the embodiment of ideal manhood, the perfect ruler, soldier, husband: "A was a man, take him for all in all" (1.2.187). By his example, the legitimate values of honour, justice, openness, faithful love, and marriage, were upheld.

[1] Quotations are from Harold Jenkins's edition of *Hamlet* (London: Methuen, Arden ed. 1982).

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As a soldier, he defeated Old Fortinbras in honourable single combat "well ratified by law and heraldry" (1.1.90). His devotion to Gertrude is described by Hamlet, and is shown on stage in the ghost's sensitivity to the fate of his queen. The memories and comments of other characters, even those of Claudius, support Hamlet's view of the late king as a representative of legitimate values. Hamlet's descent from him forms part of this picture of legitimacy, and it is from King Hamlet, and the ghost, that Hamlet inherits his disgust for the court world of Claudius, and his desire to destroy that illegitimate world. The paternal link is strong. Everyone in the court assumes that Hamlet is King Hamlet's son, the ghost tells Hamlet "I am thy father's spirit" (1.5.9), and Hamlet himself chooses the paternity of the ghost, "I'll call thee . . . father" (1.4.44), when he first sees it, and throughout the play.

In the interview with the ghost, Hamlet firmly believes in his filial bond to King Hamlet, and in the legitimate values of honour and duty which that paternity imposes upon him. It is this belief that motivates his resolve to avenge his father's death, in accord with the legitimate world's values of justice and filial duty, wishing

> . . . that I with wings as swift
> As meditation or the thoughts of love
> May sweep to my revenge.
>
> (1.5.29)

As these words reveal, however, Hamlet's vow to revenge is made in very abstract terms. His resolve is not concrete, and belongs rather to the spiritual world of the ghost, than to the physical world of the court around him. Despite its apparent strength then, the legitimate world's influence, and the very filial-paternal link between Hamlet and the ghost are present in spiritual terms only, and are easily overshadowed in the illegitimate world of the present court.

In earthly terms, the legitimate world is dead. Horatio speaks of the glorious military past of Denmark, Hamlet describes the beautiful marriage between Gertrude and King Hamlet, and his own pure love of Ophelia, in terms of the past. Two short interviews with a spiritual presence who comes in a questionable shape are the closest Hamlet ever gets to the man whom he wants to call 'father'; whereas the court world, and the father-figure of Claudius surround Hamlet all the time. Hamlet's comparison of the late king to Jove, Hyperion, Mercury, Mars, Hercules, puts the "portentous figure" (1.1.112) into the epic world rather than the world of the Danish court, and Hamlet's filial link to the late king can exist in spiritual terms only:

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Hamlet. My father—methinks I see my father—
Horatio. Where, my lord?
Hamlet. In my mind's eye, Horatio.
(1.2.184)

Because of this, the bond between Hamlet and King Hamlet is essentially a private one. Although they can see it, the soldiers and Horatio have doubts about the ghost, and Gertrude cannot even see the ghost of her husband, let alone ratify that it is the father of the prince. As Dover Wilson argues, "her eyes are held by the adultery she has committed."[2] It is only Hmalet, looking with legitimate eyes, who can see the ghost in the closet scene. Only Hamlet (and the audience) hear the ghost appeal to him as a father to a son, whereas the whole court witnesses Claudius adopt Hamlet as his son and heir.

It is the court world in which he is a "bastard son" of King Claudius which surrounds Hamlet for the majority of the play. Once the physical contact with the ghost is broken, then Hamlet's belief in his legitimacy, in his filial bond to King Hamlet, is solely dependent upon Hamlet's will to keep the memory of the ghost-father, and its demands, alive in his mind. It is not accidental that the ghost's final words to Hamlet are "Remember me" (1.5.91). It tries to strengthen the paternal link with the spiritual side of Hamlet's nature by getting him to swear, and by reappearing in the closet scene. In the action of the play, however, Hamlet's revenge, (and his legitimacy according to Laertes' terms), are dependent purely upon his memory and his faith. After the interview with the ghost, his purpose to wreak revenge may be strong, but in the illegitimate court world, as the player king warns his queen,

Purpose is but the slave to memory,
Of violent birth but poor validity.
(3.2.183)

As a legitimate son, with a duty to perform, Hamlet is born "out of joint" with the present world of illegitimacy, which he must seek to set right. The nature of that world undermines his faith in his legitimacy, and its value, however, making his task all the more difficult. It is a world based on illegitimacy which contradicts everything that King Hamlet and Hamlet's bond to him stand for, including that very paternity which demands revenge.

Illegitimacy underlies the structure of the present court world at all

[2]John Dover Wilson, *What Happens in 'Hamlet'*, (1935; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962), p. 254.

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levels. Its ruler is the antithesis to King Hamlet, and offers Hamlet a paternity which will declare him a bastard. Claudius illegitimately snatched the throne, his marriage to Gertrude sanctions incest, and "makes marriage vows / As false as dicers' oaths" (3.4.44). Whereas King Hamlet was a Hercules, a god, and a devoted husband; Claudius is described as bestial and lecherous. Names such as "satyr" and "paycock" associate Claudius with the propagation of illegitimacy through his relationship with Gertrude, which is appropriate for the head of a hierarchy of illegitimacy and has implications for Hamlet of course.

The government of the kingdom is equally illegitimate. It involves spying, and deception, relying on secrecy rather than on the openness and honesty which lies behind the principles of government in the legitimate world. Polonius's spying on Hamlet, and on his own son, the bribing of Rosencrantz and Guildernstern, Hamlet's school-fellows, to gain Hamlet's confidence, are all characteristic of the illegitimate world.

The hierarchy of illegitimacy spreads throughout the court world of the play. In Belleforest's account of *The Hystorie of Hamlet*, even the villain's ally, the king of England, is a bastard, as he discovers in a private interview with his mother in her room. This could perhaps have provided material for Shakespeare's closet scene. In Shakespeare's play, the language used of and about the court world helps to build up a picture of its illegitimacy. References to the strumpet goddess Fortune, imagery of harlots and bastards, and language of wantonness, incest, lust, pregnancy and uncontrolled breeding surround the characters of Claudius, Gertrude, Ophelia, Polonius, and the court. Rosencrantz and Guildernstern are themselves associated with bastardy, calling themselves the "indifferent children of the earth" (2.2.227), and linking themselves to the "privates" of the strumpet Fortune. Even the sexton in the graveyard describes all the corpses as "whoresons," that is, bastards. Hamlet's comment

> . . . 'tis an unweeded garden
> That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
> Possess it merely.
>
> (1.2.135)

suggests the uncontrolled propagation that is associated with the court world.

Because of its essentially insecure nature, the illegitimate world cannot tolerate the presence of elements from the legitimate world: its fixed codes of behaviour, its bonds, or its rigid demands. During the course of the play, Claudius's illegitimate court is threatened three times by offensives based on the legitimate bond between father and son, and the duty which

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that imposes to wreak revenge: the threats of Fortinbras, Laertes, and of course Hamlet. Hamlet's very presence in court, in mourning for the late king and his regime, poses a threat as an embodiment of that legitimate world's values. Claudius recognizes that Hamlet needs to be wooed to the illegitimate world, and so offers him paternity, encouraging Hamlet to think of himself as Claudius's "son" and heir, to "Be as ourself in Denmark" (1.2.122). For a king whose coronation has sanctioned illegitimate inheritance, whose marriage has sanctioned adultery and incest, what better to complete the hierarchy of illegitimacy than to have a bastard as heir to the kingdom? Claudius invites Hamlet to

> ... think of us
> As of a father; for let the world take note
> You are the most immediate to our throne,
> And with no less nobility of love
> Than that which dearest father bears his son
> Do I impart toward you.
>
> (1.2.107)

It does not matter to Claudius whether Hamlet is literally his son[3] (and a bastard to King Hamlet), or not. It is simply important that Hamlet accepts the *role* of son, for the whole regime of illegitimacy is one based on appearance. It is a world lacking in basic integrity, a world of "seeming" rather than "being," and is closely linked to the world of disguise and masquerade. Polonius's apparent concern for Ophelia's chastity, the attitude of Claudius towards the late king and his son, and the hypocrisy in Rosencrantz and Guildernstern's behaviour are part of the illegitimate world of "show." In accepting the paternity of Claudius, and the role of son, Hamlet will show his acceptance of the status quo and the values of illegitimacy on which Claudius's kingdom is based. Hamlet's initial refusal to enter that world of "show" is revealed in his reaction to his mother's question about his grief: "Why seems it so particular with thee?": "Seems, madam ? Nay, it is. I know not 'seems'" (1.2.76). His grief is not masquerade as his mother's is, as her marriage is, as Claudius's monarchy of "shreds and patches" is.

In a world where only appearances matter and illegitimacy triumphs,

[3]Where was King Hamlet at the time of Hamlet's conception? The problem of whether Hamlet could genetically be the son of Claudius is not answerable on the evidence given about the affair of Gertrude and Claudius in the text. See, however, Rupin W. Desai's article "*Hamlet* and Paternity," *The Upstart Crow*, Vol. 3, (Fall 1980), 97–106. The possibility of his own bastardy is entertained by Hamlet, and lies embedded in the play linked to a pattern of legitimate and illegitimate behaviour, to be unconsciously apprehended by the audience, is the basis of this article.

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however, Hamlet's absolute position is weak. Claudius is able to exploit Hamlet's doubts about the validity of his legitimacy, and the effect of this policy is shown in Hamlet's response to his offer of paternity: "A little more than kin" (1.2.65). He fears that his relationship to Claudius may be closer than that of kinsmen. "I am too much in the sun" (1.2.67) is significant too. As has been often noted, in addition to its literal meaning in contrast to the nighted black of mourning (and of the ghost's world), in this context, "sun" must be taken as a pun for "son," related to the possible paternity of Claudius.[4] In saying that he is too much in the son, Hamlet fears that he is more closely allied to Claudius, and to the illegitimate world, then he would like to think. Hamlet's belief that his flesh is "sullied," tainted by his mother's adultery, perhaps even illegitimate, again shows how much influence the court surroundings, and Claudius's offer, have on him.

There is, of course, minimal evidence in the play to suggest that Hamlet is the son of Claudius rather than of King Hamlet. Claudius only speaks to Gertrude of Hamlet as "our son" once and never when he and the queen are alone together. In the introduction of the ghost however, Shakespeare takes care to include indications that Claudius and Gertrude's sexual relationship dates back to the time of her marriage to King Hamlet, as it does in both the Belleforest and Saxo sources of the play. As Dover Wilson notes,[5] the ghost takes especial care to reveal this news to Hamlet, using words like "adulterate" in their literal sense to say that the incestuous love existed alongside the legitimate sexual love of the marriage. The ghost's revelation provides enough evidence to form a foundation for the vague doubts about birth in such a "distracted globe" (1.5.97) as that of Hamlet.

Hamlet's preoccupation with the theme of illegitimacy is shown in his words to Horatio:

> So, oft it chances with particular men
> That for some vicious mole of nature in them,
> As in their birth, wherein they are not guilty
> (Since nature cannot choose his origin) . . .
> (1.4.22)

It is curious that Hamlet should light on the example of a man's shameful birth as a "mole of nature" which afflicts him. The reference to "Nature's livery" a few lines later, strengthens the idea of illegitimate birth, since

[4]For the use of the same pun by a bastard character, see *Herod and Antipater*, ed. Gordon Nicholas Ross, (Garland Publishing, New York, 1979), (1.3.334–335)

[5]John Dover Wilson, "The parallel plots in *Hamlet*," *Modern Language Review*, 13, No. 2 (1918), 129–57, pp. 140–142.

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a bastard is frequently known as a "natural child." To be marked with Nature's livery thus implies illegitimacy.

In Joyce's *Ulysses*, Stephen Dedalus argues that even the ghost has doubts about Hamlet's legitimacy. Discussing the relationship between the ghost and Hamlet, Dedalus argues that Shakespeare's doubts about whether Hamnet is his own son are shown when Shakespeare, who, according to tradition, acted the part of the ghost, pleads with Hamlet, the prince, to remember him as an assurance of his legitimacy, but Hamlet shows doubts about his birth in the play. Stephen Dedalus suggests

> Paternity may be a legal fiction. Who is the father of any son that any son should love him or he any son?[6]

Hamlet's soliloquies show, however, that he desperately wants to cling on to his legitimacy and filial bond to King Hamlet. It is for this reason that he always refers to the late king as "father," and refuses ever to address Claudius as his father, calling him only "uncle-father" in association with Hamlet's "aunt-mother,"[7] Gertrude. When Gertrude says to him, "Hamlet, thou hast thy father much offended" (3.4.8), Hamlet's reply substitutes the paternity of King Hamlet for that of Claudius. As he leaves for England, Hamlet addresses Claudius as "mother" rather than "father":

> *Hamlet.* But come, for England, Farewell, dear mother.
> *Claudius.* Thy loving father, Hamlet.
> *Hamlet.* My mother. Father and mother is man and wife, man and wife is one flesh; so my mother.
> (4.3.51)

Hamlet's refusal to associate Claudius, of the illegitimate, corrupt world, with the idea of paternity and of the ideal King Hamlet, leads him to substitute the feminine world, directly associated with Gertrude, when he is talking about Claudius. At the same time his belief that this feminine world too is tainted influences his relationships to both Gertrude and Ophelia.

Throughout the play, then, Hamlet is caught in this paradox about his birth. He wants to regard himself as legitimate, and uphold legitimate values and conduct, but is surrounded by a world of illegitimacy which encourages him to doubt the need to maintain his faith in his legitimate birth, and its very validity. His viewpoint is constantly changing from

[6] James Joyce, *Ulysses*, (London, 1937), p. 196.
[7] Exploiting the secondary meaning of the word 'aunt' as whore. See Morris P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950), pl. 23.

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that of the legitimate son to that of the bastard. This schizophrenic outlook puts tremendous strain on him of course, and is closely associated with his madness. His bifocal viewpoint of the world affects his words and his actions. His attitudes and relation to other characters, particularly female characters, vary accordingly.

Speaking to Rosencrantz and Guildernstern about his sadness (2.2.297–308), Hamlet's response to his surroundings shows both bastard (malcontent)[8] and legitimate (idealist) views of the world simultaneously. The legitimate viewpoint, which regards the earth as goodly, the sky as a majestical roof, is juxtaposed with the bastard viewpoint, which sees the earth as a sterile promontory, the sky as a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours. The legitimate viewpoint seizes on the spiritual and noble qualities, and describes its surroundings in abstract rather than physical terms. Its "man" is noble in reason, infinite in faculties, like an angel, a god. This links strongly to Hamlet's relationship with the late king, and Hamlet's view of him in heroic terms. The bastard's viewpoint cannot see beyond the world of the physical present, and describes its surroundings in those terms. Its "man" is a quintessence of dust, an animal like the beast Claudius or the adulterous Gertrude. It is when Hamlet fears for his own legitimacy, that he closely adopts this viewpoint of the natural child, or bastard.

The schizophrenic nature of his personality is described by Hamlet at the end of the play, in excusing himself to Laertes (5.2.226–235). Hamlet identifies his madness as the part of his nature that has attacked the legitimate world, in offending the Polonius family honour by killing Polonius, and provoking Laertes' filial revenge. The legitimate Hamlet apologises, and feels himself wronged by the "mad" side, which is closely associated with illegitimacy.

As it appears in this play, madness seems to spring from the lack of a strong paternal presence. Ophelia's songs lament the loss of her father, and from this fatherless state, her wild and whirling words move out to the subject of loss of chastity, as she sings about the maid deflowered and dishonoured on St. Valentine's day, and speaks of the baker's daughter. In Hamlet's case, it is when he adopts madness, or seems to be mad, that he speaks most consistently from an illegitimate viewpoint, using bawdy jokes or sexual innuendo, as Ophelia does. In his interviews with Polonius and Ophelia, his skill in manipulating the language and ideas of illegitimacy is particularly noticeable. At times, however, Hamlet's distraction seems to be genuine rather than feigned,

[8] The bastard is frequently characterised as a malcontent, both in Shakespeare's work (Edmund, Don John, Caliban), and in other plays of the period (*The Hector of Germany, The Revenger's Tragedy, The Valiant Welshman*).

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and at these moments, his uncertainty about the identity of his father is felt most strongly. His madness is caused by the conflict of his desire to believe in his legitimacy, and the pressure of the contradictions which surround him. It arises from Hamlet's belief that women are wanton, as he tells Ophelia:

> You jig and amble, and you lisp, you nickname God's creatures, and make your wantonness your ignorance. Go to, I'll no more on't, it hath made me mad.
>
> (3.1.146)

Hamlet's words could relate just as easily to Gertrude as to Ophelia, because it is his mother's wantonness, her incestuous behaviour, that has led him to doubt his legitimacy, and legitimate values, and it is this which has made him mad.

Because of the ghost's revelation about Gertrude's adultery, the legitimate maternal figure is as intangible to Hamlet as the legitimate father figure, the ghost itself. Niobe and Hecuba, idealized examples of the devoted widow, are what Hamlet wishes his mother to have been, behaving according to the values of the legitimate world, not what she is. It seems that her incest, the basis of his possible illegitimacy, has become obsessive, global, in Hamlet's mind, when he thinks of her. He speaks of

> Such an act
> That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
> Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
> From the fair forehead of an innocent love
> And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows
> As false as dicers' oaths—
>
> (3.4.40)

In the closet scene, Hamlet's words show a preoccupation with the illegitimate world. Thoughts of Gertrude's adultery and its consequences have blotted out all thoughts of legitimate revenge, therefore the ghost has to reappear to remind Hamlet of his duty to his legitimate father.

Gertrude's act has corrupted Hamlet's view of the whole of womankind in its violation of the conventions of the legitimate world, and affects Hamlet's love of Ophelia too. Gertrude's incest "takes off the rose/From the fair forehead of an innocent love/And sets a blister there." Hamlet's attitude to Ophelia is divided into two distinct sections: that "once" of the legitimate past, in which he innocently loved her, knowing that she was both honest and beautiful; and that of the illegitimate present. In *this* age it is her beauty which will corrupt her honesty. Hamlet

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tells her, "This was sometime a paradox, but now the time gives it proof" (3.1.114). The illegitimate court, the "proof" which surrounds him, has made him lose faith in the values of the legitimate world. Now, where he is perhaps a bastard because of his mother's wantonness, he treats Ophelia as just so much flesh. In his bastard persona, his oaths of love should not be believed, he tells Ophelia:

> You should not have believed me; for virtue cannot so inoculate our old stock but we shall relish of it.
>
> (3.1.117)

Because of his mother's sin and his own birth, he is inherently untrustworthy. He is stamped with Nature's livery, and like everyone else in the court world, he is an arrant knave. From this illegitimate viewpoint, Hamlet warns Polonius to "look to" his daughter: "Let her not walk i' th' sun. Conception is a blessing, but as your daughter may conceive—friend, look to't" (2.2.184). The word "sun" continues the image which Hamlet used to Claudius, "I am too much i'th' sun," and can be related to Hamlet, the illegitimate "sun" of Claudius. It is of this bastard son, whose sexual behaviour is part of a world of appalling fecundity where maggots will breed in a dead dog, that Ophelia should be wary.

In the present world, where marriages are as false as dicers' oaths, Hamlet can no longer regard Ophelia as his wife, and from the sullied, bastard viewpoint, he sees her only as a whore or a cuckold maker. If she is a cuckold maker, and he possibly a bastard, then even if they marry, what chance have their children of being legitimate? "Wouldst be a breeder of sinners?" Hamlet asks Ophelia, and sends her to a nunnery. His use of this word "nunnery" reveals his schizophrenic view of Ophelia. Exploiting its secondary meaning of "stew" or brothel, Hamlet reveals his illegitimate viewpoint as well as the apparently legitimate one. The contradictory paternity links which he ascribes to her, that of a fishmonger and that of Jepthah, judge of Israel, betray the same schizophrenic approach. Whereas fishmongers' daughters were notoriously wanton, and good at breeding,[9] Jepthah's daughter was sacrificed as a virgin.

It is only at her funeral, where Ophelia's chastity has been saved like Jepthah's daughter's, that Hamlet can declare without reservation, "I lov'd Ophelia" (5.1.264). Gertrude reminds us that Ophelia was to have been Hamlet's bride, and her funeral fulfils his prophecy, "I say we will have no mo marriage" (3.1.149). As he sees the legitimate values of chastity and marriage pass into the spiritual world of King Hamlet, Hamlet's faith in the existence of that world and its legitimate values is

[9] See Harold Jenkins's note (n. 1 above), pp. 464–466.

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restored. This encourages him to act to destroy the illegitimate world around him.

It is the nature of Hamlet's belief, either in his true birth or his bastardy, which determines his ability to act or delay at any given moment. Throughout the play it is Hamlet's links with the illegitimate world which have delayed his legitimate nature's action to wreak revenge. The bastard world's masquerade of madness, which he deliberately adopts to encourage a belief in his love for Ophelia, does nothing to advance his legitimate revenge plot. It is the behaviour of "seeming" rather than "being." As Hamlet says, " These indeed seem, / For they are actions that a man might play; / But I have that within which passes show" (1.2.85), he continues. He does not want to "seem" but to *be*, and being involves acting according to his legitimate bond to avenge the death of his father. Thus, his soliloquy beginning "To be, or not to be" links directly with the kind of identity he should choose. Should he "be" the son of King Hamlet and take up arms against the illegitimate world around him; or should he "not be" but *seem* the son of King Claudius, and bear the slings and arrows of the strumpet Fortune who rules in the outrageous, illegitimate world? Although, in immediate terms, Claudius's offer of paternity seems to be an anodyne rather than a provocation to suffering, its attack on Hamlet's spirit, which is what concerns him here, is painful and harmful.

If he is truly King Hamlet's son, Hamlet cannot fail to act, the ghost tells him, several times, on the battlements. The swift return of Laertes to avenge his father's death, in Act 4, is presented as an example of the immediate response of a true born son to uphold legitimate values of honour and justice. Laertes would cut Hamlet's throat in the church to show himself his father's son in deed more than in words, and reminds the audience that any delay would proclaim him a bastard (4.3.117). Hamlet, however, delays killing Claudius, and describes his delay in language drawn from the illegitimate world:

> . . . This is most brave,
> That I, the son of a dear father murder'd,
> Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
> Must like a whore unpack my heart with words
> And fall a–cursing like a very drab,
> A scullion!
>
> (2.2.578)

The motives for delay are bastard motives, and in his delay, Hamlet sees himself not as a king's son, but as a "scullion," a "rogue and peasant slave," or a "dull and muddy mettled rascal." As Martin Dodsworth

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points out, Hamlet must *act* to re–establish his true birth. "A plan, any plan, will show that he can act for honour and show that he is no peasant, but his father's son."[10] Hamlet thus arranges the "Mousetrap" to catch the conscience of the king.

After the "Mousetrap," however, in the interview with his mother, his bastard madness tops his legitimate motive to kill Claudius, and he commits the illegitimate murder of Polonius, depriving both Laertes and Ophelia of the paternal figure. Only when he encounters the force of the legitimate Fortinbras, set to wreak revenge, does Hamlet recover his legitimate persona, and his own motivation for revenge.

His first action is to unseal the letters of Rosencrantz and Guildernstern, and to write new ones. It is significant that these letters, called "changelings," and this action, are ratified by the legitimate seal of King Hamlet's ring which Hamlet carries with him. On his return to Denmark, determined to cast away his worser, illegitimate part of nature, Hamlet announces himself with the name he shares with the late king: "This is I, / Hamlet the Dane" (5.1.250). In casting away the bastard canker, and madness from his nature, Hamlet will bring about legitimate retribution. He is ready to act upon the obligation to kill the king who has murdered his father, whored his mother, tried to bastardize and murder Hamlet himself.

Hamlet kills Claudius by making him share the drink of adultery with which he has poisoned Gertrude, and almost killed Hamlet; and by stabbing him with the poisoned sword, symbolic of the illegitimate murder of King Hamlet. Hamlet destroys the illegitimate world with its own tainted weapons, and since he too is destroyed, significantly looks to the two living legitimate characters to direct events in the future. He asks Horatio, a man he knows "is not passion's slave" (3.2.72), to report his history. Hamlet gives his dying voice to Fortinbras, the young valiant soldier who, at the beginning of the play, set out to avenge *his* father's death. Thus Hamlet re-establishes the legitimate world, and although he is destroyed, dies his father's son.

[10] Martin Dodsworth, *Hamlet Closely Observed* (London: The Athlone Press, 1985), p. 94.

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"This same skull, Sir . . .": Layers of Meaning and Tradition in Shakespeare's Most Famous Prop*

MARTIN W. WALSH

A young man in black examining a skull at arm's length. Even for those with only the most glancing acquaintance with Shakespeare, this image *means* Hamlet. Other constructs of the playwright—an ass-headed mechanical, a fat white-bearded ruffian with a tankard, lovers separated by a balcony—may also signify "Shakespeare," but that of Hamlet with the skull of Yorick dominates popular consciousness. Why? "Alas, poor Yorick" is only a brief moment in the extensive graveyard scene, which may well be a later interpolation on Shakespeare's part.[1] Why have Hamlet and Yorick become the singlemost powerful icon of the actor and his property in all of Western drama?

While not attempting definitively to pluck out the heart of this mystery, this paper will examine Act 5, sc. 1 in a fairly straightforward, though by no means usual approach, that is by, examining the prop *as prop*. It will put Yorick before Hamlet, so to speak, and proceed from there into Shakespeare's precise dramatic uses of the macabre tradition.

Shakespeare's props like the props of all playwrights, range from the functional to the symbolic. They may be perfectly neutral objects that get deeply embroiled in the action like a simple handkerchief embroidered with strawberries. The daggers in *Julius Caesar* are, of course, functional, but as Caesar's blood spreads across the stage in the "washing" scene, they become flags, as it were, of the revolution. Something of the opposite effect happens in *Macbeth* where the daggers are chiefly noteworthy for their supernatural prefigurement.

Other props are conceived as inherently more complex because of traditional iconographic associations such, as the mirror in Act 4 of *Richard II*. It gives off contradictory signals. Now it is the Mirror of Vanitas, now of Veritas. It can be argued that it creates a present, physical center for Richard's abundant imagery of tears and blindness, reflected and refracted light, and so on.

[1] The edition of Hamlet employed is The Arden Shakespeare, edited by Harold Jenkins. London / New York: Methuen, 1982.

* Paper read at the Hamlet Symposium of the University of Askansas, 6 March 1987.

[1] See Levin L. Schucking, "The Churchyard-Scene in Shakespeare s *Hamlet*, v.i. An Afterthought?" *Review of English Studies*, 11 (1935), 129-138.

Review of English Studies, 11 (1935), 129-138.

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Yorick's skull would appear to be another such complex stage property, but it has one rather unusual feature, even for Shakespeare. It emerges out of a matrix of other similar and undifferentiated props (grave refuse) in the larger context of the multiple "performances" of the graveyard scene. Richard's mirror, by contrast, arrives on stage for its heavily laden moment in a rather arbitrary fashion:

> Rich. And if my word be sterling yet in England,
> Let it command a mirror hither straight
> .....
> Bol. Go some of you and fetch a looking-glass.
> .....
> *Enter one with a glass.*
>
> (4.1.)

The context for not only the arrival but the recognition of Yorick's skull on stage is physically complex. With the use of the trap the graveyard scene comes mimetically closer to reality than the majority of Shakespeare's outdoor locales. The activity of the gravedigger-actor, with pickaxe and spade, squaring off and deepening the new grave approximates very closely the actual activity. The props, moreover, which he is responsible for heaving into view were no doubt procured from an action similar to the one being imitated here on stage. (This in itself might have been disturbing to some contemporary sensibilities.) To speculate further, there could well be a certain amount of earth included with these skulls and long bones to anchor them down and keep them from knocking about the stage, necessitating the use of some sort of dropcloth around the trap.

But the Gravedigger is interested in his hole, not in the refuse found therein. The entrance of Hamlet and Horatio creates a whole new relationship to the startling props displayed. It is a commonplace of Shakespearean criticism that 5.1 is heavily indebted to the macabre tradition in art and literature which seems to have arisen as a late aftershock of the Black Death and to have reached its peak of development in the late fifteenth century.[2]

[2] Chief works consulted Leonard P. Kurtz, *The Dance of Death and the Macabre Spirit in European Literature* (Geneva, 1975); James M. Clark, *The Dance of Death in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (Glasgow, 1950); Clifton Olds, Ralph G. Williams, and William R. Levin, *Images of Love and Death in Late Medieval and Renaissance Art* (Ann Arbor, 1976); Harry Morris, "*Hamlet* as a *Memento Mori* Poem," *PMLA*, 85 (1970), 1035–1040; Bridget Gellert, "The Iconography of Melancholy in the Graveyard Scene of *Hamlet*," *Studies in Philology*, 67 (1970), 57–56. Although this paper will not survey the macabre tradition throughout *Hamlet*, suffice it to say that it surfaces everywhere, and nowhere more traditionally and conservatively than in the last moments of the play. Among Hamlet's final lines we have, "this fell sergeant Death. . . . strict in his arrest," and from Fortinbras:

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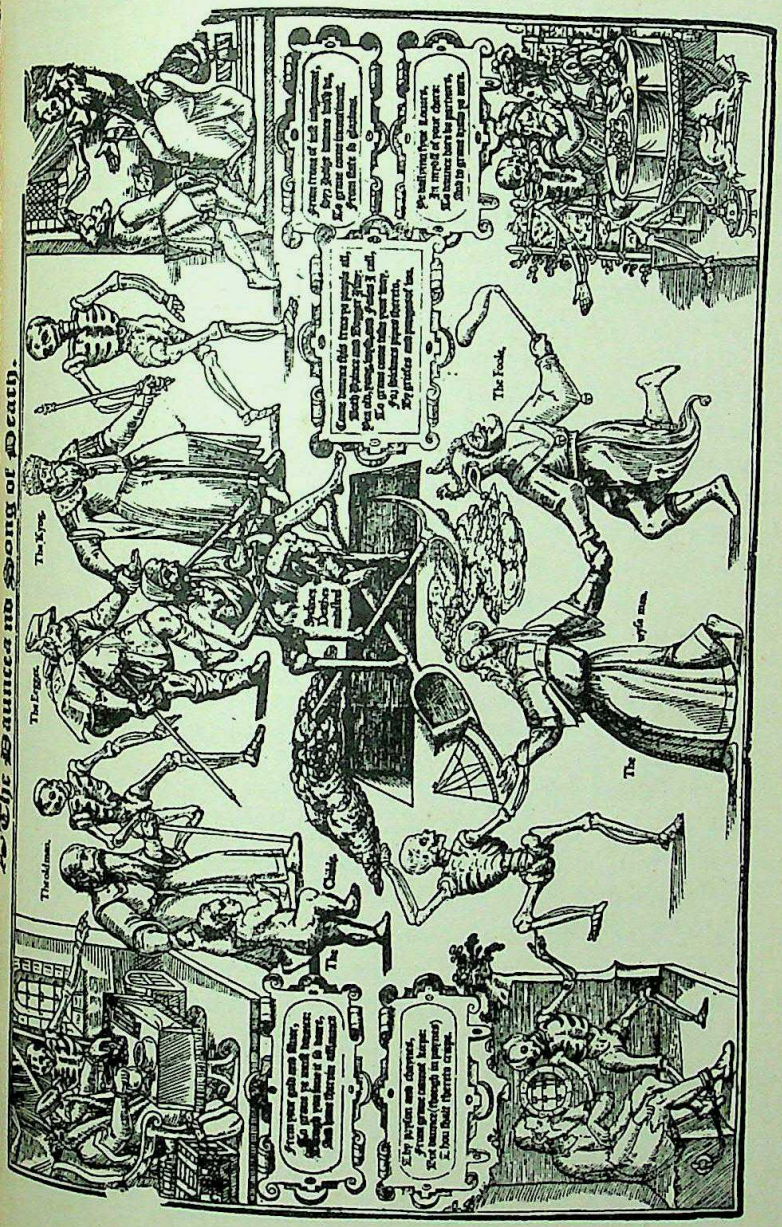

Woodcut from the broadside "Dance and Song of Death" (1569?). The Hamletic equations of Beggar and King, Wiseman and Fool, as well as the Gravedigger's "A pick axe and a spade, a spade" are prominent features of the composition.

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It brought a new "grotesque realism" to the ancient *ubi sunt* theme, and produced such bizarre artifacts as two-level *transi* tombs, the *memento mori* portrait with skull, the Triumph of Death complete with processional wagon, and the highly influential *danse macabre* in serial murals, panels, and woodcuts, in literary versions, and in proto-theatrical performances.

How does Hamlet's "performance" with the grisly props fit in with any of these late medieval manifestations? How is 5.1 a *danse macabre*, a *memento mori* poem? The entering Hamlet and Horatio respond initially to the Gravedigger's song, for they only generally perceive his activity: "Has this fellow no feeling of his business a sings in grave-making?" The aural cue has precedence over the visual. The Gravedigger's verses, from Thomas Lord Vaux and first printed in *Tottel's Miscellany* (1557), do not directly partake of the *danse macabre* tradition. Their only personified force is Age, not Death: "But age with his stealing steps/Hath claw'd me in his clutch . . . " It is only much later with the third stanza that the particular apparopriateness of this ditty becomes apparent: "A pickaxe and a spade, a spade, / For and a shrouding sheet." The song itself does not cue Hamlet into the macabre tradition, rather it is the incongruity of the normal (a laborer singing at his work) with the strange (a new grave being hacked through previous burial layers) that disturbs and inspires Hamlet, and presumably the audience as well.

The purely visual cue of the first skull tossed up into view immediately sets off a chain of associations from the song directly into the *danse macabre* tradition, with a glancing reference to the Mystery Plays:

> *Ham.* That skull had a tongue in it, and could sing once. How the knave jowls it to th' ground, as if it 'twere Cain's jawbone, that did the first murder. This might be the pate of a politician which this ass now o'er-offices, one that would circumvent God, might it not?
>
> (lines 74–79)

The anonymous skull is compared to Cain's own jawbone and not his traditional murder weapon, the jawbone of an ass.[3] But the passage itself is a bone of contention. May I, presumptuously, put in a claim for a reading or emendation giving the sense of "jowls it to the ground as if *with* Cain's jawbone"? Then the sexton with his furious spade equals

---

. . . O proud Death
What feast is toward in thine eternal cell,
That thou so many princes at a shot
So bloodily hast struck?

[3] See John Kester Bonnell, "Cain's Jaw-Bone," *PMLA* 39(1924): 104–146.

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Cain with his jawbone, the clown's "jowling" of the headbones of his (possible) betters, equalling the "first murder", fratricide. The important point, however, is that Cain the bringer of death into the world, is there at the outset of Hamlet's impromptu *danse macabre*. Dances of Death in the visual arts, such as Holbein the Younger's famous sequence, frequently begin with scenes from the Fall of Man.

The second fleshing out of the skull involves actual mimicry as Hamlet, always in equal parts melancholic and "satirical rogue" (2.2), puts on the voice of an unctuous courtier, anticipating his own encounter with Osric later in the act: "Good morrow, sweet lord. How dost thou, sweet lord?" The third victim in this little court satire is "Lady Worm," who by the simple process of metonymy is so made into her own *transi* or partly decomposed cadaver.

The appearance of a second skull brings the leveling satire down to the middle orders, with a lawyer and a land speculator. Hamlet here goes into high gear as "satirical rogue" punning on the technical vocabulary of these vocations:

> Is this the fine of his fines and the recovery of his recoveries, to have his fine pate full of fine dirt? Will his vouchers vouch him no more of his purchases, and double ones too, than the length and breadth of a pair of indentures?
>
> (lines 104–108)

As Didi and Gogo might put it, "that wasn't such a bad little canter," and this ends the first phase of Hamlet's macabre performance. Up to this point Horatio has been the exclusive audience for these meditations, fulfilling the role of noncommittal straightman. There has been no interaction with the Gravedigger nor, directly, with the props. It has been purely an *exercise* like that upon the "delicate and tender prince" earlier. Hamlet shares the same imaginative power that Villon had over the skulls piled up in the Cemetery of the Innocents where everyone was a finance minister or a navvy, bishop or a lamplighter, "*Autant puis l'ung que l'autre dire.*"[4] But Hamlet the performer is also the disengaged spectator of a "job of work." (Is there any other place in Shakespeare where simple physical labor is observed for so long?) The satire is consequently general, impersonal even if *we* can gather in other characters in the play, dead or soon to be dead—the "circumventing" Polonius; the begging courtiers, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; and Lady Gertrude whose blood is tame and waits upon the judgment.

[4] From *Le Testament* (1469), lines 1744–1759. *The Poems of Francois Villon*, translated by Galway Kinnel. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977), pp. 136–137.

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As Philippe Ariès has recently reminded us in *The Hour of our Death*:

> The *danse macabre* is an eternal round in which the dead alternate with the living. The dead lead the dance; indeed, they are the only ones dancing.... The art lies in the contrast between the rhythm of the dead and the rigidity of the living.[5]

In the literary forms of the *danse macabre* a single figure of Death initiates dialogue with the various stations and estates. How is the macabre performance of 5.1 activated? Hamlet's "dance" skips over a surface of possibilities, it is pure wit, playful, non-consequential. It is absolutely dependent, however, on the separate and independent stage action of the sexton, whose low comic physicality should perhaps be more, not less, given repeated phrases such as, "jowls to the ground," "knocked about the mazzard," and later, "sconce," and "play at loggets." The Gravedigger has all the rough, incursive energy of Death himself but lacks a consciousness of Death. The two "performances"—Hamlet's and the sexton's—need to be joined in order fully to bring the action of the *danse macabre* into realization. And so Hamlet must engage this source of energy: "I will speak to this fellow."[6]

The *memento mori* tradition, which in its largest sense includes the *danse macabre* motif, was originally a devotional aid. It had a transcendental function, to point one toward the other three in the "Four Last Things," namely Judgment, Heaven or Hell, and shock one into recognition of life's impermanence and fragility. There were, however, what we might call "horizontal" developments within the tradition that touched the afterlife only by refraction. This was particularly true in the *danse macabre* where we can posit two poles in this horizontal movement, a positive one encouraging a *carpe diem* attitude, and a negative or nihilistic one. To the positive side might belong Hans Baldung Grien's (c. 1481–1545) preoccupation with the idea of "Death and the Maiden" in several paintings and chiaroscuro woodcuts in which the truly horrific realizations of Death are fully matched by the sensuousness of the female nudes. The levelling satire implicit in the *danse macabre* could just as easily gravitate toward nihilism when not firmly grounded theologically. A contemporary of Baldung Grien's, Niklaus Manuel (c. 1484–1530), seems to exemplify this pole in his great Berner Totentanz.[7] There the figures of

[5] Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, translated by Helen Weaver, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1981), p. 116.

[6] The line echoes Hamlet's confrontation with the ghost—"I will speak to thee." (1.4.44).

[7] See esp. Robert A. Koch, *Hans Baldung Grien: Eve, the Serpent and Death*, (Ottowa: National Gallery of Canada, 1970); Joseph Leo Koerner, "The Morification of the

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Death are absolutely anarchic clowns in the manner of macabre Marx Brothers. One hauls the pious Hermit off by his long beard and sports an equally hairy jaw in mockery of him. Another in the cap of a sick man leans over the shoulder of the Doctor and, with a thigh-bone, cracks the upheld urine flask leaking its contents all over the medical man. One skeletal trickster is even about to jerk away the Painter's support rod (this being a self-portrait) as he puts the finishing touches on a group of Jews and Muslims. There is even one skeleton, right at the head of the series, who is having a great horse-laugh at the crucified Christ, who remains very much dead. Holbein was to employ much the same principle of dressing the Death figures with the associated accoutrements of their dance-partner victims, but with infinitely greater sensitivity. Manuel, soon to be a strident Reformation propagandist, was definitely out of control.

The macabre performance of 5.1 up to line 115 has, as should be obvious, no reference forward to an immanent or at least inevitable afterlife. The two clowns at the opening of the act, though caught up in their legal quibbles over suicide, at least have some sense that Ophelia's soul is at stake. Hamlet's macabre speculations move only horizontally out along society and never once rise to Judgment. This point is important to emphasize, given the Hamlet of "a divinity that shapes our ends" and of a "special providence in the fall of a sparrow" later in the act. Shakespeare has included another plane, however. There is a definite sense of the biological past if none of the eschatological future. It begins with the rhetorical question: "Did these bones cost no more the breeding but to play at loggets with 'em? Mine ache to think on't" (lines 90–91). The boneache is perhaps intentionally bawdy here, for Hamlet's own "breeding" will soon be entangled in the performance.

In moving from the safe bubble of spectator to engagement centerstage with this figure, who now signals many roles fragmentarily in his labor—the "Goodman Delver," old Adam, head-belaboring Cain, the *danse macabre's* merry, pitiless exposer of mortality—Hamlet encounters a vacuity, literally, a hole in the stage. The bone props recede in importance as the question of ever assigning ownership or authorship to this nothing, a hole, crumbles away. Hamlet seems clearly bested in this first pass with the sexton. It is as if he approached the ambiguous figure fully intending to exercise his rapier wit and came away slicing at air. He must turn to Horatio and return to topical social satire—a passage, by the way, which seems to make the only reference, and not very direct at

Image: Death as a Hermeneutic in Hans Baldung Grien." *Representations*, 10 (1985), 52–101, and Paul Zinsli, *Der Berner Totentanz des Niklaus Manuels*, (Bern: Verlag Paul Haupt, 1953).

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that, to the eternal round of the Dance. "The age is grown so picked that the toe of the peasant comes so near the heel of the courtier he galls his kibe." (lines 136–137.)

The vacuity of the Gravedigger, moreover, turns Hamlet's biographical question, "How long hast thou been grave-maker? "(line 138) back upon himself, and the talk is all of "mad" Hamlet. This "'twill away again from me to you" (line 124) is unnerving. The ironic superiority inherent in the motif of the royal-figure-in-disguise-among-the-lowly is of no comfort. Hamlet's enjoyment of the banter is only superficial. At the edge of the trap he is soon plunged back into the heart of the play's disease—corruption imagery. "How long will a man lie i'th' earth ere he rot?" (line 158) is no idle change of subject like the changes of personae for the skulls earlier. As Ariès observes:

> What macabre art did show was precisely *what could not be seen*, what went on under the ground, the hidden work of decomposition, which was not the result of observation, but the product of imagination.[8]

The macabre performance of 5.1 moves now down through the artisan class, in the person of the impervious tanner, to the very bottom of human society. The sexton draws our and Hamlet's attention back to the skulls and singles one out. It could well be a skull we have not seen before, possibly deformed. The gravedigger knows it well enough, but he delays the identification for a half a dozen lines at least: "This same skull, sir, was Yorick's skull, the King's jester" (lines 174–175). The economical lines;

Ham. This?
Grave. E'en that.

(lines 176–177),

precisely indicate the transfer of the skull from the Gravedigger's to Hamlet's hands. The Gravedigger's display of the skull had been familiar, anecdotal and teasing—"Whose do you think it was?" But by giving this grave refuse a local habitation and a name the macabre performance of 5.1 moves into a territory wholly unexpected. Hamlet must fall back on Horatio, at least metaphorically, in the vertigo of his emotional recall:

> Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio, a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times, and now—how abhorred in my imagination it is. My gorge rises at it.

[8] Ariès (n. 5 above), p. 128. Ariès also supplies abundant evidence that historical gravediggers well knew by whom, and for how long, various plots in their graveyards were occupied.

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Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft.
(lines 178–182)

The particular "abhorrence" called for by the macabre imagination alternates with precise and vivid memories of childhood. Although it is only a brief moment, it does afford us a small window upon the soul of Hamlet, one of the most telling in the play, for here is pure uncomplicated affection. His musings upon his dead father are remote and idealized and his love for Ophelia seems already tainted before the play begins. Only his "heart of hearts" speech to Horatio seems comparable. The Yorick moment gives us Hamlet's uncensored past, and the brutal honesty of the macabre meditation is its proximate cause. Rather than pointing Hamlet onward toward Judgment, it anchors him to at least one genuine positive emotion in the past, a brilliant psychological stroke on Shakespeare's part.

But Yorick, the King's jester, seems to be two creatures here. The first is the "whoreson mad fellow," the traditional crude trickster who would be expected to amuse the rough and ready military court of old Hamlet with stunts like pouring a flagon of Rhenish on the head of the sexton gravedigger ("baptizing" the one who prepares our last rites?). Hamlet himself refers to this traditional raucous clown when he resumes the *ubi sunt* theme: "Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar?" (lines 183–185). The other fool is the childlike playmate of the Prince whose memory provokes Hamlet's rather startling admissions. In all the anecdotal material relating to court fools gathered by antiquarians and scholars from Robert Armin to A.F. Nick, James Doran, Maurice Lever, Barbara Swain, and Enid Welsford there is nothing at all like this.[9] I have found, in *kermess* paintings of the Brueghel family, several images of a costumed fool leading little children by the hand or playing tag with them.[10] He does not seem to be at the church-ale to amuse the adults but to serve as a "child-care professional" while the parents cavort and drink as Flemish peasants are wont to do. The normal

[9] Chief works consulted: Robert Armin, *A Nest of Ninnies* (1608), edited by P.M. Zall (Lincoln, 1970); A.F. Nick, *Die Hofund Volks-Narren* (Stuttgart 1861); James Doran, *The History of Court Fools* (London, 1858); Barbara Swain, *Fools and Folly during the Middle Ages and Renaissance* (New York, 1932); Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History* (New York, 1935); Maurice Lever, *Le sceptre et la marotte* (Paris, 1983); Werner Mezger, *Hofnarren im Mittelalter* (Constance, 1981); and E. tietze-Conrat's art historical survey, *Dwarfs and Jesters in Art* (New York, 1957).

[10] See esp. Ludwig Munz, *Brueghel: The Drawings*, translated by Luke Hermann, (London: Phaidon Press, 1967), no. 138; and Georges Marlier, *Pierre Bruegel le Jeune*, (Brussels, 1969), pp. 234–239 and 294–298.

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relation of court fools to royal children seems to be generally much cooler, as reflected in Velasquez's famous painting "Las Meninas," when such a relationship can be established at all.

My argument is that the piggyback-riding, child-kissing Yorick is close to pure invention on Shakespeare's part, and one need not appeal to modern psychology to find in Yorick a parental surrogate, particularly striking given the androgynous character of the traditional fool.[11] The moment, however, is brief, and Hamlet is soon using the skull again in a manner consonant with the macabre tradition. The difference is that he is now actively engaged with the prop in performance, and we have added the irrational number of the fool into the equation. Yorick as death's head is the superior fool who dashes the historic court jester out of countenance. The latter has not one gibe, gambol, song, or flash of merriment to mock this grinning. His mouth is agape—"Quite chop fallen." Hamlet moves from the motif of the jester quelled to the heavily laden *topos* of the Fool and the Lady. With an implied gesture of sending Yorick as the winged skull, Hamlet returns to a traditional image of *Vanitas*, but, given the recent autobiographical disclosures, "my Lady" must conjure up Gertrude, and possibly Ophelia as well:

> Now get you to my lady's chamber and tell her, let her paint an inch thick, to this favour she must come. Make her laugh at that.
> (lines 186–189.)

The intertwining of the fool in the Danse with the Fool and the Lady needs amplification. In traditionl *danses macabres* from the fifteenth even to the eighteenth centuries, the fool is usually the last in the series, the very tail-end of human society. When it is not a fool in this position it is a child. (Hamlet's macabre performance maintains the sequence with fool *and* Child piggyback in the last frame.) In the early sixteenth century and especially among the German graphic artists, there was a tendency to dress Death in the livery of the fool, which, on one level at least, is perfectly contradictory. The fool, pure instinctual man living only in and for the present, can be viewed as the polar opposite of Death, that astringent summoner toward a future reckoning.

Within the nihilistic strain of the macabre tradition, however, Death was no longer the servant of God bringing comfort or salutary shock. Rather, he was an adversarial trickster, one who would make a bad joke

[11] See esp. Elizabeth Maslen, "Yorick's Place in 'Hamlet'," *Essays and Studies* (1983), 1–13. For a discussion of the androgynous Fool, see William Willeford, *The Fool and His Sceptre: A Study in Clowns and Jesters and their Audience* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), esp. chap. 10. See also Norma Jenckes' symposium paper "Narcissus at Elsinore," for complementary notions on Hamlet's affections. See p. 102 of this vol.

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of all worldly accomplishments. Pieter Breughel the Elder juxtaposes the two macabre fools in the lower right corner of his massive "Triumph of Death" (c. 1562). There a large round covered table attracts the eye, under which a young fool in a red-and-white particolored suit is scrambling to hide. He has not been spotted by any of the myriad of plundering skeletons, but on the other side of the table stands another fool in dark grey, a skeletal waiter offering a dish with the crown of a skull inside. This new image was not incompatible, either, with a certain misogynistic strain, for Death as fool was prominently associated with young women. In Holbein's famous series of woodcuts, quite possibly encountered by Shakespeare, Death appears in full fool's livery to spirit away the Queen. In a remarkable pair of engravings, dated 1540 and 1541 respectively, Hans Sebald Beham portrays a fool accompanying a young woman and offering her flowers (Woman's Power over Man) and, in identical pose and costume, Death as the Fool offering her an hourglass (the Vanity of Earthly Beauty).[12] Thus within one speech Yorick as affectionate memory metamorphoses into the scourge of misogynistic satire. Hamlet's need to perform seems to outweigh his desire to reminisce, although I would argue that the tender Yorick moment is the emotional climax of the scene—what the macabre performance has been moving toward and as quickly moves away from, but not before the audience has "poor Yorick" indelibly printed on its consciousness.

Hamlet vaults from the Danish sot to the greatest emperor of them all, Alexander. He has absorbed the grotesque elements of the Gravedigger who now completely fades from the stage picture. Hamlet's "abhorred" imagination is now racing, causing his senses, it would seem, to become particularly acute: "And smelt so? Pah!" (line 194).[13] This is the traditional place where Hamlet drops or puts down the skull. "Yorick" is probably not needed for the chop-logic demonstration of how Alexander's dust comes to "stop a beer barrel," but there is no reason why the prop cannot continue to be used or referred to. The demonstration seems playful enough on the surface, with a hint, perhaps of the Alexander and Diogenes (he of the barrel) tradition and just a whiff of the "carnivalesque." The performance must however be even more disturbing than the earlier social satire (is Hamlet actually toying with the earth?) for it prompts Horatio's first real comment, "'Twere to consider too curiously to consider so" (line 199). It must have some of the energy of Hamlet's macabre spinnings after the murder of Polonius in 4.3 ("A

[12] For Holbein, see facsimile edition *The Dance of Death* (New York: Dover Publications, 1971). The two Beham engravings can be found in Lever, pp. 42–43.

[13] See esp. Richard D. Altick, "*Hamlet* and the Odor of Mortality," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 5 (1954), 167–176.

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certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet . . . we fat ourselves for maggots").

The *danse macabre* tradition, for all its grotesquery, remained staunchly anthropomorphic. Hamlet's macabre vision can revert to something even more elemental and frightening. We might call it the "alimentary" vision of Death, where the worm and the intestine are convoluted and conflated, leading to perhaps the most macabre image of the play, the showing of "how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar" (4.3.30–31). The "horizontal," levelling satire of the *danse macabre* is made into an even more nihilistic loop through the worm-intestine configuration. This radical vision is Shakespeare's own, but we can find traces of it, too, in the more popular expressions in the macabre tradition. I will mention only one here, the Flemish *Vander Mollenfeeste* by Anthonis de Roovere (c. 1430–1483), which is controlled not by a skeletal or cadaverous figure of Death but by the quiet presence of "old mole" (mollengijs).[14] Even the impressive ghost of Old Hamlet, another "old mole," seems to pass down this alimentary canal.

Here in 5.1, however, we are only dealing with dust; but the scene can be understood as pushing the macabre meditation even further, beyond the "alimentary." Hamlet is caught in a radically atomistic universe with no hope of *ataraxia*. Performance seems to be his substitute for imperturbability. Hamlet now bursts into rhyme, perhaps even into song. We might even speculate further that, given the jogging rhythm of "Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay," we might even have a "jig" performance here. Hamlet has never departed from the improvisational mode in Act 5, and this impromptu is the culmination of his macabre performances. It is clear, in any case, that Hamlet has not only totally absorbed the point of view of the Gravedigger, but his vocal and physical energies as well. In this last "beat" of macabre, Hamlet might very well have transformed himself into a leaping, clowning cadaverous Will Kemp.

"Here comes the King" at line 210 moves us abruptly into the next

[14] Tilde Sankovitch, "*Vander Mollenfeeste* by Anthonis de Roovere," *Allegorica* 4:1/2 (1979), 122–129. The short poem includes such images as going to the country of old mole (*landt van mollegijs*) and dancing at the mole's feast (*Ghy moet ghaen danssem ter mollen feeste*). The 15th-century "A Disputacion betwyx the Body and Wormes" presents a particular grotesque situation in the English tradition, although its teaching is perfectly traditional and salutary.

[15] See R. Lvell Asher's symposium paper "Hamlet's Too Curious Considerations." See pp. 102–103 of this vol. Thanks to Prof. Asher for referring me to William Kerrigan's article "Atoms Again: the Deaths of Individualism," in *Taking Chances: Derrida, Psychoanalysis, and Literature*. Edited by Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), pp. 88–106.

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unit of action and away from our immediate subject. The Gravedigger fades to a pure functionary as the stage fills with people. The open trap with perhaps the displayed skull remains a focus of attention, however. Within the complex visual patterning here is the observable fact that Yorick's bones have been broken apart and spread to make a last resting place for Ophelia: The Fool and Death, the Fool as Death, Death and the Maiden, a fresh corpse and withered old bones. We are, moreover, within a Shakespearean archetypal construct that is not peculiar to *Hamlet*, the association of Fool and Maiden—Viola-Feste, Rosalind-Touchstone, and in the tragic dimension, Lear's Fool, who pines for the banished Cordelia and indeed melts into her with "And my poor fool is hang'd."[16] The symbolism has little to do with the traditional Folly of submitting to Woman's wiles or of fleeting earthly beauty; it has everything to do with the experience of innocence, vulnerability, and a fragile joy. Hamlet's tender moments over Yorick's skull are physically and imagistically linked to all that he has lost in Ophelia. His earlier "mad" perusal of Ophelia's face "as a would draw it." (2.1) might have already indicated the artist experiencing the skull beneath the skin, evidence again of Shakespeare's amazing intuition for gestic mirroring. Yorick's reopened grave indeed becomes the curiously imploded stage for Hamlet's supreme act of folly in the "antic disposition," his struggle with Laertes for Ophelia's love. And thus we can see the humble prop, emerging out of a tradition of the macabre, becoming in Act 5 of *Hamlet* the hub of the great wheel of Folly, Love, and Death upon which so much of Shakespeare turns.

[16] See S. N. Ray, "Lear's Fool" in *Shakespeare: A Book of Homage*, (Calcutta: Jadavpur University, 1965), pp. 159–166; and Roger Ellis "The Fool in Shakespeare: A Study in Alienation," *Critical Quarterly*, 10 (1968), 245–268.

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"To what base uses we may return": Class and Mortality in *Hamlet* (5.1)

MICHAEL COHEN

Critics are in general agreement that the first scene of *Hamlet*, Act 5, derives its power from an almost exclusive concentration on death.[1] But none of the critics, so far as I know, points out that class considerations are hardly less important than death as the scene's subject matter, and that there are really two competing subtexts in the scene, one that argues that death is the ultimate leveller of all class distinctions, another that argues, with almost equal persuasiveness, that class distinctions continue even after death.

I

The First Clown begins, in the scene's and the play's dominant mode, with a question: "Is she to be buried in Christian burial when she willfully seeks her own salvation?" More than a third of the play's scenes begin with a question in the first speech, and each of this scene's sections is introduced by a question—from Hamlet:

> Has this fellow no feeling of his business a sings in grave-making?

and

> I will speak to this fellow.—Whose grave's this, sirrah?

from Laertes,

> What ceremony else?

and from Hamlet again,

> What is he whose grief
> Bears such an emphasis, whose phrase of sorrow
> Conjures the wand'ring stars and makes them stand
> Like wonder-wounded hearers?
>
> (lines 1–2, 62–3, 210, 241–44)[2]

As audience, we register the Clown's malapropism and infer the intended *damnation* for "salvation," infer also that Ophelia must be

[1]See, for example, Maynard Mack, "The World of *Hamlet*," *The Yale Review*, 41 (1952), 502–23; Roland Mushat Frye, *The Renaissance Hamlet* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[2]All quotations are from *Hamlet*, ed. Willard Farnham. (Baltimore: The Pelican Shakespeare, Penguin Books, 1957).

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meant, and do so with surprise, since only twenty lines ago Gertrude described Ophelia's death as an accident. While the clowns discuss the mad idea that one can commit suicide in self-defense, we have time to assess this new mystery. Here the Second Clown pronounces the coroner's finding: it must be Christian burial—one of those reports in *Hamlet* that looks like evidence until it is undercut by the next suggestion. In this case the Second Clown suggests, and later the priest confirms (215), that the Christian burial of Ophelia followed a "great command," presumably from Claudius. The king has suborned the coroner. That is the conclusion of the Second Clown—that Ophelia's burial in sanctified ground is a consequence of her rank:

> Will you ha' the truth on't? If this had not been a gentlewoman, she should have been buried out o' Christian burial.
>
> (21–23)

The Second Clown is little more than the butt of the First Clown's jokes, and thus he has little chance to become a character of any weight. But here he speaks the first lines in the play that overtly criticize the class structure. At various times throughout *Hamlet* there are hints of how the play's events strike different classes differently. Examples are Marcellus's speech in 1.1 about how the war-watch "So nightly toils the subject of the land" and the conversation between the Captain and Hamlet in 4.4 over those many soldiers who will die because "a delicate and tender prince" wants a worthless piece of ground. In the play's last scene will come Hamlet's remarks about Osric: "Let a beast be lord of beasts, and his crib shall stand at the king's mess. 'Tis a chough, but, as I say, spacious in the possession of dirt" (87–89).

For the moment, however, the gravedigger's reponse turns the topic to the ridiculous:

> Why, there thou say'st. And the more pity that great folk should have count'nance in this world to drown or hang themselves more than their even-Christen.
>
> (24–26)

The gravedigger then shifts the conversation to his own occupation. The gravemaker's work spans the whole of human history. Digging was Adam's profession, and the gravemaker's work lasts till doomsday. The fact that the houses he makes are being continually broken up and their present tenants ejected to make way for new ones does not get into the gravedigger's riddle. He has a talent for the paradoxical. His instances are the "permanent" dwelling from which he is even now throwing the bones of former residents, the suicide who acts in self-

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defense, and Adam who is no gentleman because he digs (according to the old poem, "When Adam digged and Eve span / Who was then the gentleman?"), but who *is* a gentleman because he bore arms, needing them to dig.

The paradoxical wit play may perhaps divert our attention momentarily from the topic that has been raised by one clown, confirmed in the other's opinion, and which will be further confirmed by what we hear from the priest later. It is that even death makes no revolution in the classes—there is privilege and no levelling even in matters funereal.

The clowns see the suborned coroner and priest as agents of an upper class conspiracy to make sure the rich and privileged are treated with class distinctions even after death. When Ophelia's funeral procession enters, however, we find that Laertes is unhappy with the priest's intervention in the ceremonies for Ophelia because he hasn't gone *far* enough in giving her her due. Laertes thus suggests another agency of exploitation—the church—which here makes a distinction God would not make, shunting the apparent suicide to a kind of underclass. But this is not to say that God espouses a classless society: rather, Laertes insists, this earthly discrimination will be rectified by God, who will restore *rightful* class distinctions:

> I tell thee, churlish priest,
> A minist'ring angel shall my sister be
> When thou liest howling.
>
> (227–29)

Laertes has to be satisfied, in other words, with the traditional opiate of the underclass that these abuses will be righted after death.

Laertes' twice-repeated question "What ceremony else?" brings the Doctor's response:

> Her death was doubtful,
> And, but that great command o'ersways the order,
> She should in ground unsanctified have lodged
> Till the last trumpet. For charitable prayers,
> Shards, flints, and pebbles should be thrown on her.
> Yet here she is allowed her virgin crants,
> Her maiden strewments, and the bringing home
> Of bell and burial.
>
> (214–21)

Our response to the dispute between Laertes and the Doctor has more complexity than mere sympathy with the bereaved brother. The Doctor can be seen as one of the king's toadies who was influenced to bury

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Ophelia in sanctified ground but who would not go farther to allow her the burial service; against this figure we side with Laertes, and find the "shards, flints, and pebbles" speech gratuitously cruel and "churlish." On the other hand, the clowns have suspected that the rules applying to all the rest of us have been lifted for this woman because she is "great folk," and now Laertes is demanding even more. The Doctor thus can become a conservative representative of the people against the corruption of power, while Laertes and Claudius are now together on the other side from our sympathies. This shift is made more possible because of Laertes' ambivalent position in our sympathies, even before he opens his mouth. His bereavement seems to demand our sympathy, but his conspiracy with the king pushes him to the side of villainy. At either hand, we see privilege and great command affecting the treatment of even the dead. But this is not the prince's subtext.

II

Hamlet's opening question asks how the First Clown can sing at grave-making. Horatio's answer might be taken to apply to more than the gravedigger's experience: "Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness" (64). Horatio may say the line as referring purely to the gravedigger ("this man is different from us"), or he may say it, with some feeling, as applying to Hamlet's situation ("you can or should be like this man"). That is, he may speak kindly ("thank heaven you have reached some similar easiness"), wishfully ("would that you had achieved such easiness"), or warily ("are you about to relapse from what serenity you have achieved?"). In any case, the opening exchange concerns getting used to death, and the gravedigger obliges by singing an apt verse and throwing up a skull. The gravedigger's song, which had sounded merry enough at its opening, turns lugubrious:

> But age with his stealing steps
> Hath clawed me in his clutch,
> And hath shipped me intil the land,
> As if I had never been such.
>
> (67–70)

The gravedigger's adoption of a song persona who is already dead is only one of the paradoxical features defining his relation to the others in the scene. He digs a grave that is his and not his; he "lies" in it while the dead Ophelia and the soon-to-be-dead Hamlet and Laertes "lie out on't." As wit pretender, he bandies words with real wit, and wins. His presence in the grave is by custom, choice, and long profession. The

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others are there by extraordinary happenstance to bury one who died by accident, or if by choice, only by deranged choice. He takes the role of current jester; the real jester is long dead, now providing only a foul smell and a *memento mori*. The gravedigger survives and prevails; he will bury Hamlet, too.

It is not *to* the gravedigger, but *of* him and of the skull that he throws up that Hamlet speaks to Horatio:

> How the knave jowls it to the ground, as if 'twere Cain's jawbone, that did the first murther! This might be the pate of a politician, which this ass now o'erreaches; one that would circumvent God, might it not?
>
> (71–75)

Hamlet first observes that it is a *knave* who handles the skull, though it might have been a politician's—"this ass," the knave of a gravemaker, now "o'erreaches" the height of his better in life, possibly one who, Hamlet ironically speculates, might himself have circumvented God—letting the defiance of rank move up the scale. Knowing one's place in the scheme of things is hard not only for the knaves; humility is required of the exalted as well as the low. The skull might have belonged to a courtier, might even have been a lord's, and as Hamlet moves quickly up the social and economic scale until he is musing on the dust of an emperor and a world conqueror, he points out that the skull is *now* a mere vassal of "my Lady Worm's." "Here's fine revolution, an we had the trick to see't" (84).

Hamlet's first set of applications has to do with power and station: the politician who would circumvent God, the courtier and the lord. The second set has to do with occupations of law and land-buying. Hamlet compares the situation of the dead with the exercise of power by the living, with the delights of station and of occupation, of acquisition, of making small distinctions (quiddities, quillities, and tricks). The dead have suffered a revolution; equal and powerless, they are "my Lady Worm's" subjects, "Knocked about the mazzard with a sexton's spade," without influence, without property beyond the dirt in their skulls, evicted even from the grave to make room for another of their number. In Hamlet's subtext, death *does* make a revolution.

There is a small difference of opinion between the workers and the idle gentlemen who stand above them making puns. Can this difference be resolved by an encounter between the gravemaker and the prince, a dialectic between the classes?

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III

Hamlet is interested in graves. He has perhaps heard the old advice that before setting out on revenge one should first dig two of them. But he does not find out from the sexton whom this grave is for. He changes tack and asks how long the grave-maker has been at his occupation. The answer comes back in pieces: "I came to't that day our last king Hamlet overcame Fortinbras.... It was the very day that young Hamlet was born . . . I have been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years" (134–35, 137–38, 151–52). The coincidence—not the first in the play—means that the motive of young Fortinbras's revenge is just as old as young Hamlet. It means that the story of his father's heroism has been with Hamlet since his birth—helping to explain his hyperboles about his father at 1.2.139–153 and 3.4.56–64.

Hamlet's response to the gravedigger's remark that he has "been sexton here, man and boy, thirty years" is to ask "How long will a man lie i' th' earth ere he rot?" Hamlet may be thinking of his own body, having taken to heart the contemporaneity and symbolic association of his life with the gravedigger's trade. On the other hand, he may just be looking for an expert opinion, now that he is on the ground and on the subject, from a man who has made it his work for so long. Or he may be thinking of his father. Could one of these skulls be old Hamlet? When scholars defend the discrepancy between Hamlet's youth at the beginning of the play and his obvious age of thirty here, they say it gives the effect of Hamlet's emotional growth and maturity. They do not mention that it also may suggest that old Hamlet has been in his grave quite a long time. But whether the time has been long or short, Hamlet does know, or ought to know, that a man rots before "eight or nine year," even in a cold country ("But if indeed you find him not within this month, you shall nose him as you go up the stairs into the lobby"—4.3. 35–36).

The encounter between the gravemaker / sexton and Hamlet can be pleasant enough; the two friends are patient and indulgent with a working man who aspires to wit and entertains them and himself while he works at a job most would consider unsavory. The spotlight stays on the prince. Another reading places more emphasis on the gravedigger's jokes, not as knee-slapping humor, but as a very well-played set of the game called *getting the best of the gentleman*. A fairly complex shift of sympathies can take place in this part of the scene, to the extent that we may not be seeing it at all from Hamlet's class viewpoint when we hear him say "By the Lord, Horatio, this three years I have taken note of it, the age is grown so picked that the toe of the peasant comes so near the

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heel of the courtier he galls his kibe." In the wordplay, Hamlet is bested on *lie*—"You lie out on't sir"—which can simply mean "you are not in it," but also gives Hamlet the lie without committing the sexton; he is bested on *quick*; on *man* and *woman*; on *came to be mad* and *ground*. In the meantime, Hamlet has been called a fool or worse (137), and the gravedigger has gotten off at least one shot about "pocky corses" with the upper classes in general as its target. Finally, it is at least likely that the gravedigger's figure for how long a body will lie in the earth before it rots is so outrageously long just to see if the gentleman will buy it—and he apparently does. The encounter is a fine revolution in wit, if we have the wit to see it, but less surprising and certainly not revolutionary in its more symbolic aspects—the overreaching of youth by age as well as the more specific, predictive besting of Hamlet by death disguised as a games-player or jester.

IV

It is instructive to compare this conversation with Hamlet's encounter with Osric in the next scene. Osric advances the plot in summoning Hamlet to the contest set up by the king and Laertes; he is also a conspirator himself, as may be seen at 5.2.295; but he is first a clown who engages unwillingly and apparently unknowingly in wit-combat with Hamlet. His function and that of the gravedigger in 5.1 are thus parallel, but the characters are antithetical: the gravedigger is innocent, plain, of mature years and lower class; he gets the best of his verbal bouts with Hamlet. Osric is an accomplice, fancy in his language and, by stage tradition, his dress; he is young and if not titled at least rich, "spacious in the possession of dirt"; and he is bested by Hamlet and Horatio without ever quite knowing what is happening.

Osric survives too, and shows something about the way the world will continue to be, with or without Hamlet, Laertes, Claudius, Gertrude, and those who die even earlier in the play. As long as the Osrics are "spacious in the possession of dirt," they will remain pretty much as they are, and however many wit battles may be won by the gravediggers, they are going to continue to be the underclass—and we could hardly ask for a better symbolic representative of the underclass than a man who is mostly below ground when we first see him. The gravedigger bests Hamlet on the particular topics they joust upon, but Hamlet is right and the gravedigger and his assistant wrong about privilege: it does not continue after death, in any way that can matter. Hamlet both abhors and rejoices in the classlessness of death: it amuses him to think that "a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar" when the king is Claudius, but it tears at him when the king is his father. In this

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play, though, there is never much question about real revolution on *this* side of the grave. Whichever revenger triumphs in the end, not much will have changed. The play's most ironic moment is, indeed, when it looks as if the most lowborn of the high and mighty may take the throne. An obsequious messenger announces Laertes and his "riotous head" breaking their way into the castle:

> The rabble call him lord,
> And, as the world were now but to begin,
> Antiquity forgot, custom not known,
> The ratifiers and props of every word,
> They cry, 'Choose we! Laertes shall be king!'
> Caps, hands, and tongues applaud it to the clouds,
> 'Laertes shall be king. Laertes king!'
>
> (4.5.102–108)

The irony comes from the straightfaced invocation of a conservative myth to defend an upstart "vice of kings" and "cutpurse of the empire," as if Claudius had been on the throne by old heredity and as if he had not, just before Laertes went to France, taken over by a process as subversive, as antiquity–and custom-defying as this of Laertes just now.

But of course Laertes does not succeed. Nor does Hamlet, but it *is* another prince who steps in with a soft word, "I have some rights of memory in this kingdom," and an army behind him. There is no evidence that his own pronouncement of death's triumph over the highborn is more than conventional:

> This quarry cries on havoc. O proud Death,
> What feast is toward in thine eternal cell
> That thou so many princes at a shot
> So bloodily hast struck?
>
> (5.2.353–56)

He was an infant when his father died. He has yet to feel just what a leveller death can be.

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NOTES

Echoes of *Hamlet* in *Great Expectations*

STANLEY FRIEDMAN

Referring to *Hamlet*, Joseph Gold asserts that "no other work of literature had so powerful an influence or was so consistently present to Dickens."[1] The novel that contains the most conspicuous and most extended mention of this play is *Great Expectations*, in which Pip and Herbert attend a production featuring Wopsle in the role of the prince. Moreover, the nearly exact centrality of this episode in the narrative, placed in the nineteenth of Dickens' thirty-six weekly installments, further suggests its importance. In the account of Wopsle's acting (xxxi, 275–76), the attention given to the tragedy's graveyard scene may remind us of the cemetery setting with which the novel opens, and, as William F. Axton observes, the resemblance between Pip and Wopsle, two aspiring pretenders, is emphasized when the former, after seeing his old acquaintance's histrionic efforts, dreams that all of his own expectations are "cancelled" and that he himself must "play Hamlet to Miss Havisham's Ghost" (xxxi, 279).[2] In this chapter, however, as well as elsewhere in the novel, Dickens' use of *Hamlet* extends far beyond employing the drama to highlight the significance of Wopsle as a comic parallel to Pip.[3]

First, Pip's dream of playing Hamlet with Miss Havisham as the Ghost suggests that the young man has a sense of himself as the main figure in a story about extraordinary circumstances that will call upon him to take decisive action. The dreamed comparison perhaps also points to the narrator's intuition that Miss Havisham, who is both living and "dead"—a "ghost"—is using him as an instrument of revenge. Indeed, Estella soon afterwards speaks of the "tortures" suffered by the greedy relatives over Miss Havisham's apparent patronage of Pip (xxxiii, 287), and Pip himself subsequently accuses the heiress of "humouring" his "mistake" in order to punish her "self-seeking relations" (xliv, 374).

[1] *Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1972), p. 184, n. 4.

[2] *Circle of Fire: Dickens' Vision & Style & The Popular Victorian Theater* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1966), p. 132. For *Great Expectations* I use Angus Calder's edition (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965); for *Hamlet* I employ *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans and others (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

[3] Robert F. Fleissner, *Dickens and Shakespeare* (New York: Haskell House, 1965), pp. 185–218, examines relationships between *Hamlet* and *Great Expectations* and notes numerous similarities, several of which I consider in my discussion.

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In addition, the dream about being compelled to "play," rather than *be*, Hamlet "before twenty thousand people, without knowing twenty words" of the part (xxxi, 279), intimates Pip's feeling of unworthiness, his fear of being unable to behave heroically.

Great Expectations, however, includes many more reflections of *Hamlet*. Like the prince, Pip has a loyal friend and confidant who is "not passion's slave" (3.2.72), as Herbert Pocket's patience and good sense in his relationship with Clara Barley reveal.[4] Just as Hamlet, after listening to the Ghost's disclosure of a terrible crime, exclaims, "O cursed spite,/That ever I was born to set it right!" (1.5.188–89), so Pip, after hearing Magwitch's revelation about being the secret benefactor, complains about his own plight to Herbert: "Was there ever such a fate!" (xli, 357). Then, too, in both the play and the novel the protagonist embarks on an abortive voyage, Hamlet heading to England, Pip seeking to leave it. And just as the dying Hamlet fears for his posthumous reputation—"what a wounded name,/Things standing thus unknown, shall I leave behind me!" (5.2.344–45)—so Pip, facing destruction at Orlick's hands, feels a "dread of being misremembered after death" (liii, 436).

Of course, these resemblances—if noticed—may either raise or lower Pip in our estimation, for they may be taken as amplifying or as ironic, depending on whether his character and the difficulty of his situation appear truly equivalent to those of Shakespeare's protagonist. But *Great Expectations* also contains other references to *Hamlet* that seem more clear in their effects.

Perhaps the most important of these reflections concern Miss Havisham. As Robert F. Fleissner indicates, her apparition-like qualities, her vindictiveness, and the fact that Pip specifically dreams of playing Hamlet "to Miss Havisham's Ghost" make her a definite parallel to King Hamlet's spirit.[5] We may also notice additional similarities. Late in the novel, when the elderly recluse, who has come to regret her actions, is seriously injured in a fire, we may be reminded of the penitential flames by which King Hamlet's "foul crimes. . . / Are burnt and purg'd away" (1.5.12–13); and the woman whom Pip mistakenly regards as his foster-mother—"she has as good as adopted me" (xxix, 253)—is also like Hamlet's father in being a victim of betrayal—not by a brother and spouse, but, instead, by a half-brother and prospective mate.

Moreover, Miss Havisham introduces into *Great Expectations* a theme from the second secene of *Hamlet*, the combining of marriage and funeral:

[4] Fleissner, p. 204, suggests a parallel between the Horatio-Hamlet and Herbert-Pip friendships.
[5] Ibid., p. 202

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"With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage" (1.2.12).[6] Her repeated prophecy and bizarre wish that the long table set up for her wedding feast will eventually serve as her bier, so that her relatives may "feast" on her (xi, 113, 116, 117), may be considered an inversion of Hamlet's gibe, "the funeral bak'd meats/Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables" 1.2.180–81). Of course, we are told earlier that Miss Havisham's "withered bridal dress" looks like "grave-clothes," while her "long veil" resembles "a shroud" (viii, 90). Her aforementioned wish to be placed when dead on the long table is twice recalled by Pip (xviii, 167; xxii, 205), who later refers to "the funereal room" containing "the ashes of the bridal feast" (xxix, 260) and then eventually describes how the bed of the badly burned woman is, indeed, placed on "the great table" (xlix, 415). In addition, this theme of the conjunction of death and feasting seems emphasized in Pip's report of the Shakespearean performance: Wopsle, playing Hamlet in the graveyard scene, replaces the skull, wipes his fingers on "a white napkin," and hears a heckler call out, "Wai-ter!" (xxxi, 275). This linking of mortality and eating may also recall to us the passage in *Oliver Twist* in which the narrator, after noting "the custom on the stage, in all good murderous melodramas, to present the tragic and the comic scenes in as regular alternation, as the layers of red and white in a side of streaky bacon," proceeds to comment that "such changes" are "not so unnatural as they would seem at first sight" and refers to "the transitions in real life from well-spread boards to death-beds" (xvii, 168–69).[7]

While the marriage-funeral motif in *Great Expectations* seems to reinforce the vindictive Miss Havisham's connection with the Ghost in *Hamlet*, it also serves to link the heiress with another character in the play—Gertrude. Hamlet's mother has disgraced herself sexually by adultery and hasty remarriage, while Miss Havisham has in a sense been dishonored by being jilted. Just as Hamlet feels betrayed by his mother, so Pip complains of having been misled by the woman he thought to be his "fairy godmother" (xix, 183), virtually a foster-parent (xxix, 253). Gertrude is, of course, the actual mother of King Hamlet's son; Miss Havisham is foster-mother to Estella, a child fathered by Magwitch, who, as Fleissner observes, resembles the Ghost in *Hamlet*, for the convict makes a mysterious appearance and reappearance, has come from the

[6]For a discussion of the *feast* and *funeral* juxtaposition in *Hamlet*, see Joan Webber, "*Hamlet* and the Freeing of the Mind," pp 76–99 in *English Renaissance Drama: Essays in Honor of Madeleine Doran & Mark Eccles*, ed. Standish Henning, Robert Kimbrough, and Richard Knowles (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976), esp. pp. 80–81, 94–96.

[7]For *Oliver Twist* I use Peter Fairclough's edition (Baltimore: Penguin Books 1966).

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Hulks (like the "prison-house" of purgatory [1.5.14], desires vengeance, and wishes to use the protagonist to obtain this revenge.[8]

The connection between Miss Havisham and Gertrude becomes even more noticeable later in *Great Expectations*. When Pip, after Magwitch's appearance and revelation in London, goes to the recluse and reproaches her, she places "her hand to her heart" (xliv, 376), and, when Pip visits her the next time, she speaks of seeing in him "a looking-glass" that reveals what she "once felt" herself (xlix, 411). These details suggest lines spoken by Hamlet and Gertrude in the scene in the latter's chamber: "You go not till I set you up a glass/Where you may see the [inmost] part of you," "let me wring your heart," "O Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain" (3.4.19–20, 35, 156). Miss Havisham's exclamation, "What have I done! What have I done! (xlix, 411), seems parallel to Gertrude's cry, "O Hamlet, speak no more!/Thou turn'st my [eyes into my very] soul" (3.4.88–89).

While the link between Magwitch and the Ghost seems to emphasize the convict's role as a victim of treachery seeking revenge and also to stress his paternal status towards Pip, the relation between Miss Havisham and Gertrude may direct added attention both to the former's maternal role towards Pip and to her guilt, for although the heiress is a victim, she is also a betrayer of Estella, Pip, and herself.

The parallels between *Hamlet* and *Great Expectations* intensify the tragic features in the novel, the grim themes of hidden guilt, revenge, parental misconduct, disillusionment, and death. If Dickens was unaware of some of these analogues, his unintentional introduction of them is of interest in illuminating his attitudes towards his own story. More probably, he was at some stage of composition fully alert to these echoes from Shakespeare's most famous play and believed that they would provide enriching reverberations for readers who noticed them.

[8] Pp. 196–98. A. L. French, in "Beating and Cringing in *Great Expectations*," *EIC*, 24 (April 1974), 147–48, states that when Magwitch appears in London he resembles the Ghost in his late-night arrival, his mysterious nature, and his insistence that secrecy be promised in an oath (from Herbert [xl, 354]). Dianne F. Sadoff, in *Monsters of Affection: Dickens, Eliot & Bronte on Fatherhood* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982), pp. 33–36, also examines similarities between the Ghost and Magwitch, as does William A. Wilson, in "The Magic Circle of Genius: Dickens' Transformations of Shakespearean Drama in *Great Expectations*," *NCF*, 40 (Sept. 1985), 158–59.

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A Congruence of Personalities—Hamlet and Claudius

AVRAM GIMBEL

Shakespeare's *Hamlet* opens with Hamlet and Claudius seemingly as different as can be. Claudius is a take-charge man. He is upbeat and with his recent wedding to Gertrude and ascension to the throne, he's in a celebratory mood. Fortinbras's forces are assembled on the border, but this is nothing he cannot handle. Hamlet, on the other hand, is melancholy, sarcastic, and a pall over the happy mood in the palace. It appears that we have two very different antagonists. However, as Rene Girard, in his article "Hamlet's Dull Revenge," points out, "Shakespeare . . . is more interested in the undifferentiation of revenge than the differences of character portrayal."[1] In correspondence with Girard's observation, I contend that Hamlet and Claudius's fascination with each other leads to their "undifferentiation," their mutual frustration, and, finally, the play's violent ending.

First, I'd like to show that Hamlet and Claudius's characters were probably not much different to begin with. Hamlet's personality was just temporarily thrown out of kilter. Even prior to his conversation with the ghost, Hamlet had good reason to suspect foul play in his father's death. We have circumstantial evidence that Claudius isn't as beneficent as he appears. Somehow he is too jovial for a monarch whose land is about to be invaded. In the first scene, Horatio tells us that, as "whisper goes," Prince Fortinbras of Norway has "Sharked up a list of lawless resolutes" (1.1.80, 98), supposedly to invade Denmark. This smacks of whispered rumors. Claudius possibly fabricated the Fortinbras affair to intensify the need for Gertrude's hasty marriage to himself. He also makes a great show of affirming Gertrude's participation in control of the state when he calls her "Th' imperial jointress to this warlike state." (1.2.9) These are excellent sales words to use on a relatively passive, and as we see in the closet scene, easily swayed woman. We shortly learn that Fortinbras has been quieted with a rebuke, a bribe, and permission to invade Poland.

Because Hamlet had more reason for his melancholy than his mother's hasty marriage, it can be concluded that his behavior was far from normal at the play's opening. Prior to his father's death, he was probably as regal and upbeat as Claudius is now. Fortinbras substantiates this view

[1] Rene Girard, "Hamlet's Dull Revenge," *Stanford Literature Review*, (1984), p. 162.

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when he tells us, " . . . he [Hamlet] was likely, had he been put on, / To have proved most royal . . . " (5.2. 397–398). Even Claudius has admitted to "the great love the general gender bear him" (4.7.18). Based on his unhampered banter with Horatio, Hamlet is evidently a good deal more ad lib and witty than Claudius. But, for his own protection, except in his soliloquies and asides, Hamlet hides his true feelings and feigns madness. Not until the final scene of the play does he verbalize his reasons for his antagonism toward Claudius. He describes Claudius as "He that hath killed my king, and whored my mother,/Popped in between th' election and my hopes, / Thrown out his angle for my proper life" (5.2.63–66). Coleridge summed up Hamlet's perspective before the ghost appears: "He [Hamlet] is the heir apparent of the throne; his father dies suspiciously; his mother excludes her son from his throne by marrying his uncle."[2]

Hamlet's play *The Mousetrap* brings Claudius's good cheer to an abrupt halt. Claudius now becomes anxious and guilt-ridden. When Hamlet catches him unguarded and kneeling in prayer, he has his sword in hand ready to strike. But he reasons,

> Now might I do it pat, now 'a is a-praying,
> And now I'll do't. And so 'a goes to heaven,
> And so am I revenged. That would be scanned.
> A villain kills my father, and for that
> I, his sole son, do this same villain send
> To heaven.
>
> (3.3.73–78)

By killing Claudius, Hamlet could have achieved his original ambition of taking the throne. But he now wants revenge. Sending his adversary to heaven is not a proper revenge.

Girard observes that "Claudius resembles Hamlet in his inability to take prompt and healthy revenge on his enemies."[3] After all, he could kill Hamlet outright as easily as Hamlet could have killed him. Instead, Claudius attempts to have England do his dirty work for him. In the commission he sends along with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, as intercepted by Hamlet, he reminds England that "thy cicatrice looks raw and red / After the Danish sword" (4.3.60–61) and they owe him homage." He asks them for,

> The present death of Hamlet. Do it England,

[2]Samuel Taylor-Coleridge, from *The Lectures of 1811–1812*, Lecture XII (Signet Classic, New American Library), p. 190.
[3]Girard, 193.

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For like the hectic in my blood he rages,
And thou must cure me. Till I know 'tis done,
Howe'er my haps, my joys were ne'er begun.
(4.3.58–68)

In a further congruence of personalities, Claudius is becoming, like Hamlet, a cautious killer.

Hamlet takes out his frustration on Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, whom he perceives, as they truly are, Claudius's spies. In doing away with his former friends, he mimicks Claudius exactly. Using Claudius's writing style, he pens a new commission, which concludes, "Without debatement further, more or less, / He [the English monarch] should those bearers put to sudden death, / Not shriving time allowed" (5.2.38–48). Hamlet imitates not only Claudius's writing style, but his attempts at remote-control killing.

Referring to both Hamlet's and Claudius's redundant and inept actions, Girard observes that: "In the end it becomes difficult to distinguish strategy from procrastination."[4] Deeply frustrated and stalemated, their only course toward resolution of their conflict is mutual and simultaneous violence. Hamlet and Claudius engage in a kind of dance of death.

Claudius, now in a high state of anxiety, enlists Laertes and makes plans and backup plans to do away with Hamlet. Both Laertes, in his match with Hamlet, and Claudius, as a celebrator, will resort to Claudius's proven technique for getting rid of enemies. Hamlet will be poisoned—by Laertes's sword, *and* by Claudius's poisoned wine.

In the final scene, Hamlet is as smooth and cool as Claudius was in the play's first act. He has learned his lessons in treachery. He apologizes to Laertes; lies to him; telling him that it was "his madness" that murdered Laertes's father and caused the death of his sister, not he, Hamlet. A hustler to the core, Hamlet flatters Laertes about his swordsmanship. Not to be outdone, Claudius orders trumpets, kettles, and cannon, and drinks "to Hamlet's better breath" (5.2.273). Hamlet's and Claudius's characters have merged until their words and manners are undistinguishable.

In what must be the ultimate act of mimesis, Hamlet, using Claudius's favorite modus operandi, pours the poisoned wine into the mouth of his already mortally wounded foe.

[4]Ibid.

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PRODUCTIONS

Hamlet in Arkansas*

For Shakespeareans weary from a long day of paper presentations, the University of Arkansas Theatre's two-and-a-half hour production of *Hamlet* was generally welcomed. Though somewhat apologetic about its brevity, director Roger Gross explained at a luncheon talk that the reasons for such a curtailed version were beyond his control. School children and senior citizens are transported to the theatre in buses for matinees, and if the play has not ended at the appointed hour, the buses carry away one's audience. To accommodate these demands, Gross was forced to pare the script to the barebones. Familiar faces—Fortinbras, the second gravedigger—have disappeared, along with selected scenes and many lines of dialogue. To keep the action moving at a rapid clip, Gross suspended the scene 1.2 in which Horatio and the soldiers notify Hamlet of the Ghost's appearance. He then shifted the audience's attention to stage right, where the Polonius family discuss Laerts' departure and Ophelia's relationship with Hamlet (1.3). When that episode concluded, we returned our gaze to stage left as Hamlet thanked his friends and announced his intention to visit the battlements that night. This cinematic innovation saved time and increased the audience's impression that a great deal was taking place behind the scene in Elsinore.

Director Gross also increased the play's pace by shortening certain words. Believing that Elizabethan pronunciation differed from that of modern speakers, he reduced multisyllabics like *Polonius* and *incestuous* from four syllables to three. Gross argues that these foreshortenings are suitable for Shakespeare's meter, demonstrating that the playwright's iambic pentameter verse is more regular than critics have found it to be. For student actors unfamiliar with Elizabethan pronunciation, moreover, such emendations give them a better understanding of the linguistic personalities of the characters they play. According to the director the changes he has made, which include the shifting of stress in words like *character*, enhance the audience's appreciation of the music in the playwright's blank verse. (Gross will fully explain his method of revision in his forthcoming book, *Speaking Shakespeare's Verse.*)

Perhaps a more revealing reason for the production's fast-forward

*Review of the University of Arkansas Theatre's Production of *Hamlet*. 7 March 1987. Directed by Roger Gross and Patricia Relph.

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pace can be found in the director's opinion that the tragedy should not be regarded as depressing. "The play is about the education of Hamlet," he observed in an interview published in the *Northwest Arkansas Times* (Sunday, March 1, 1987). "He goes through hell to learn wisdom and when he dies... he is happy in accepting death." Rather than a brooding Hamlet, then, the audience saw a Herculean hero. A. Collin Roddey as Prince certainly maintained the energy of an aerobic workout, jogging quickly away from his friends to pursue the Ghost, turning viciously on Ophelia, darting in and out of the play-within-the-play, and leaping into the final struggle with Laertes. There was little evidence of the dilatory, melancholic philosopher in this performance. Yet Roddey, who bears a striking resemblance to stage and screen actor Kevin Kline, spoke his lines clearly and crisply, even though because of the cuts and rearrangement of scenes he could have been accused of performing highlights from *Hamlet*. He commanded the theatregoer's attention throughout, however.

No doubt his most embarrassing moments came when he was required to deliver two infelicitous lines that resulted from director Gros's rewordings. Near the end of the "rogue and peasant slave" soliloquy (2.2.554 ff.), Roddey shouted "I should ha' fatted all the region kites / With this slave's *giblets*." Gross apparently felt that his Arkansas audience could not decipher "offal"; though it scanned, his substitution provoked shock and embarrassed laughter among some of the viewers. Later, when Hamlet berated Gertrude for her lust (3.4), he expressed his revulsion at the thought of her lying "In the rank sweat of an *ensemened* bed." That the sheets of the royal bed were stained with ejaculate rather than greasy perspiration seemed to Gross a conceit more readily understood by those in attendance. The reaction to this change was similarly skeptical, however. Perhaps the substitutions were simply more familiar to the actor and thus posed fewer problems in memorizing them. Roddey kept his composure here and elsewhere, displaying a talent for giving proper weight to both words and emotion.

The other performances were consistently impressive, especially for an all-student cast. T. Lee Poynter and Jonelle Grace rendered Claudius and Gertrude with skill and finesse. Poynter in particular conveyed an air of self-indulgence that made his unbridled enjoyment of queen and crown believable. Both actors performed their roles in a formal style, resonant of that in the play-within. Their movements were almost mechanical, as were those of the other courtiers, especially Osric and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. This directorial interpretation underscored the artificiality of the Claudian court and the seeming royalty of

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its leaders. Ray Newton's Horatio, wearing spectacles to emphasize his scholarly bent, was subdued and convincing. The Polonius family lacked some luster, the weakest performance coming from George A. Gracey in the role of Laertes. He appeared too fragile for the part, which requires considerable raging and boasting. Stanton Dossett's Polonius (pronounced *Polonyus* here) was believable as a doddering, sometimes forgetful but always pontifical, counselor-father. As Ophelia Melanie McClain nearly matched Hamlet's gymnastic ability in her mad scene movements. Rather than flowers and herbs, however, she passed out to the stunned onlookers what looked like dried reeds. The symbolism here was somewhat heavy-handed, the scene losing some of its poignancy as a result. Deserving special comment for his delightful rendition of the gravedigger was Juan E. Insua. His orotund appearance and hearty delivery of his songs and saws brought the comic caricature to life.

The professional quality of the production was enhanced by R. H. Roggenkamp's set design and Patricia Romanov's costumes. Their achievement was even more notable in light of the meager budget provided them. (Romanov received only $ 1000 to make forty costumes, for example.) Roggenkamp built eight large columns to represent the soaring ambition of Claudius' court. He painted the stage floor in red and silver squares, giving it the appearance of a chess board. Employing a reversed perspective and an apron, the designer managed to project the onstage action into the audience. Romanov's Elizabethan costumes were opulent and colorful (with the exception of melancholic Hamlet's, of course), contributing to the impression of a court world given over to luxury. Director Gross composed special music for the play; its minor chords and atonal effects nicely highlighted the emotion of Ophelia's nunnery and mad scenes. The final duel was a masterpiece of choreography (rehearsals took four to five hours a week), making for a spectacular resolution to the action.

Although the approximately three-hundred spectators who saw this Arkansas University Theatre performance of *Hamlet* could not claim to have witnessed Shakespeare's complete tragedy, they were treated to a lively, fast-paced enactment. Considering that most of the actors had never before performed in a Shakespeare play, their speaking styles and gestures revealed the mature confidence one expects only in seasoned actors. Surely this happy result must be attributed to the actor's hard work and the expert direction of Roger Gross and his wife Patricia Relph. Many of the Shakespearean scholars who spent the day speculating on the tragedy's intriguing problems found that this performance gave them renewed faith in the enduring theatricality of *Hamlet*.

ROBERT F. WILLSON, JR.

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REVIEWS

A Review of Periodical Articles (1986)

Something have we heard of Hamlet's transformation. Let critical theorizing do what it will, discussion of *Hamlet* has a habit of returning to the place where fascination with the play began—Hamlet's own complex character. This is certainly true of this year's articles, which explore some of the many sides of the prince, or of what critics take to be the prince.

First, then, comes Hamlet as prophet old-inspired. Noting that both Amleth in Saxo Grammaticus and Hamblet in the Belleforest have gifts of divination, Michael Srigley[1] argues that certain references in *Hamlet* suggest that Shakespeare, too, is presenting Hamlet as psychic. Early examples may be seen as precognition ("My father—methinks I see my father," 1.2.184, and "O my prophetic soul! My uncle!" 1.5.41); but later Hamlet is clearly in possession of information to which he has no normal access, informing as he does his mother that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are to marshal him to knavery. When Claudius tells him that sending him to England is good "if thou knew'st our purposes," Hamlet replies "I see a cherub that sees them" (4.3.50–1). If we take this statement seriously (guardian angels were deemed able to pass on knowledge of future events), then we seem to have a pattern of references endowing Hamlet with a sixth sense. The dangers of building a theory upon a few lines of a text are evident, especially when the text is a play and apparent problems can, as Harold Jenkins notes of Hamlet's prior knowledge of the king's plans for his journey to England, pass unnoticed in the theatre. Still, Srigley supports his idea with some intellectual ballast: Shakespeare's portrait of Hamlet perhaps follows Ficino's combination of two psychological theories about inspiration, Plato's teachings on divine madness and Aristotle's on the association of melancholy and thought. He then side-steps the problem of how such a theory is to be reconciled with Hamlet's later defiance of augury (5.2.215) by arguing that now Hamlet has come to see his melancholy-inspired divine madness as undesirable, adopting instead Christian attitudes found in works such as Martin Del Rio's *Disquitionum Magicarum* (1599) and James IV of Scotland's *Daemonologie* (1597), that visionary states of mind could be an illusion of the devil. Thus we end up in the familiar territory of the 'transformed' Hamlet, but by an interesting route.

[1] Michael Srigley, "Hamlet's Prophetic Soul", *Studia Neophilologica*, 58, no. 2 (1986), 205–14.

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The same pattern, a scenic journey to a conventional terminus, is provided by Bert O. States.[2] He compares *Hamlet* and the two parts of *Henry IV* as "variations on the theme of the education of the prince." The two characters, though not interchangeable (Hal's problem is how to become a king, Hamlet's how to kill one), can be very easily conceived of as responding similarly to each other's situation. This is because they are both dominated by imposed circumstances ("the father-son theme with its heavy emphasis on 'the debt' to be paid by the prodigal son") and both respond with deviousness and playfulness, hanging back from responsibilities and expressing themselves in "socially errant" behaviour. They are both "true *histriones*" who exude schizophrenic energy before a baffled court. Hamlet is an advance upon Hal, for in the later play Shakespeare uses incompatible behaviour more expressively to depict a character whose mystery "can only be partially explained through the text." The basis of the character-type is, nevertheless, there in Hal: his "I know you all" speech, cruel though it seems to many critics, is as much a "demonstration of the suddenness with which a temperament can shift its course" as Hamlet's conduct in the nunnery scene. By these means Shakespeare is setting a division within his character's mind, contrary meanings which suspend our response in uncertainty. Though, as in Srigley's essay, the argument is backed up by some instantly-validating intellectual references (modern rather than historical this time: Shakespeare's psychological profundity lies in his reflection of the Sartrean existentialist view that "we have to deal with human reality as a being which is what it is not and which is not what it is"—language like that could only be twentieth-century), the final view of Hamlet is ultimately orthodox and unsurprising. States's lucid essay is actually more interesting about Hal than about Hamlet.

Shorter notes, too, tend to confirm familiar views of Hamlet. First this time comes the scholarly Hamlet. Hamlet's reply to Claudius's "How fares our cousin?" is characteristically enigmatic: "Excellent, i'faith, of the chameleon's dish. I eat the air, promise-crammed. You cannot feed capons so" (3.2.92–4). The interpretation that Hamlet is continuing his cat-and-mouse game with Claudius by alluding to the succession issue and to suspicions that Claudius is plotting Hamlet's death, demands, says Anthony Miller,[3] an incredibly alert audience. Actually, the lines are based on half-remembered passages from that classic school-text, Erasmus's *Colloquies*. There a scholar's hopes for

[2] Bert O. States, "Hamlet's Older Brother," *The Hudson Review*, 39, no. 4 (Winter, 1987), 537–52.

[3] Anthony Miller, "A Reminiscence of Erasmus in Hamlet, III.ii.92–95," *English Language Notes*, 24, no. 1 (September, 1986), 19–22.

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advancement have been disappointed: his patron "promisit"—cf. Shakespeare's "promise"—and the scholar's belly consequently cannot be 'crammed' ("saginatur") with just hope. In the next dialogue but one there is a joke about a "capus" ('capon') turning into a "gallus" ('rooster' or 'Frenchman'). Shakespeare was probably familiar with the passages, for an earlier dialogue is a source for lines in *Love's Labour's Lost*, while the proverb quoted in the second dialogue, "cucullus non facit monachum," is cited in Latin form in *Twelfth Night* and *Measure for Measure*. To catch all this would seem to demand an audience who had conned their schoolbooks more carefully than experience suggests is usual; and, if the audience's ability to catch references is less important than what's going on in Hamlet's mind, then Miller's premise is equally undermined. The allusion is, however, appropriate enough: perhaps Hamlet is both half-remembering his Erasmus and teasing Claudius.

Another learned allusion sheds light, proposes H. M. Klein,[4] on the old "Rightly to be great / Is not to stir without great argument" (4.4.53–4) debate. A passage in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (IV.iii.23) praises the great-souled man as one who does not involve himself in danger for trifling reasons, but will face any danger in a good cause. The most straightforward reading of Hamlet's lines, placing the "not" with the copula, provides this meaning, with Fortinbras as the reckless adventurer and Hamlet as the wise man. This confirms Hamlet as both scholar and man of sense, and does seem to be consistent with a normal reading of the lines.

Perhaps, too, Hamlet knows his popular proverbs. Margaret Weedon[5] tentatively but engagingly proposes that a lost proverbial jingle might underlie another old textual favourite (see, for example, this review in vol. 6 of *Hamlet Studies*). In a mid- to late-eighteenth century chapbook, *The World turn'd Upside Down*, a baby is described as being as like its supposed father "As ever hawk was like a hand-saw, / Or horned bull a harmless genza" (or, in another text, "ganza"). "Ganza" is recorded in *OED*, the earliest usage being Philemon Holland's translation of Pliny's *Natural History*: "The Geese there . . . be called Ganzae." A variant, "gan-saw," is noted in Henry More's *Divine Dialogues* (1668). Weedon thus conjectures a rhyme for things obviously different: 'as like as Hawk is to Handsaw or Bull is to Gansaw.'

As Alan C. Dessen's recent *Elizabethan Stage Conventions and Modern Interpreters* has reminded us, stage conditions must be at least as important,

[4]H. M. Klein, "'Rightly to be great': *Hamlet*, IV.iv.53–6," *Notes and Queries*, 33, no. 3 (September 1986), 357–8.

[5]Margaret Weedon, "Hawk, Hand-saw, and Ganza?" *Notes and Queries*, 33, no. 3 (September 1986), 356–7.

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if not more so, as linguistic allusion in making conclusions about plot and character. A useful article by James L. Hill[6] applies one familiar condition, the playing of female tragic parts by boy-actors, to differences in methods of characterization. His premise is that "the differing methods used for the presentation of male and female characters are determined by the capacities and limitations of the actors portraying them"—a modest premise, but a productive one. With regard to *Hamlet* (Hill goes on to discuss *Macbeth, Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra* as well), he contrasts the complex roles of Hamlet and Claudius, set up by the tension of 1.2, with the relatively simple characterizations of Ophelia and Gertrude. Yet these female characterizations are just as successful in their own way: although their roles involve relatively few lines (neither has even half as many as Polonius), Shakespeare makes them memorable through an economy of strategy. Ophelia's role, for example, is laid out in 'blocks', first that of arch sister, then that of dutiful daughter. Thus the boy actor has not to take the lead in difficult transitions, but to respond appropriately to two different relationships in turn. As in the case of Lady Macbeth, Shakespeare avoids the difficulty of portraying a gradual movement into madness, instead shifting abruptly into madness. Portraying it largely by means of songs in the role of Ophelia also takes advantage of the actor's musical training and thus makes the scene a 'performance' for the boy.

Ralph Berry's[7] article demonstrates, though, how a similar method of approach to Hamlet himself can quickly become a means of bolstering one's preconceived view of his character. Berry examines the doubling of parts which, he suggests, the symmetrical structure of the play (see Keith Brown, *Shakespeare Survey*, 1973) clearly indicates. Thus, for example, the actors playing Bernardo, Francisco and Marcellus in Act One are all available for doubling in the later stages of the play. Berry's conclusion from a study of calendars of the London and Stratford-upon-Avon theatres is that Shakespearean performance has no tradition of conventional doubling, it being mainly a matter of opportunism and necessity. But, argues Berry, 'conceptual doubling' (i.e. a deliberate choice by the director for thematic reasons) reveals more interesting ideas. Thus the Ghost / Claudius doubling in Peter Hall's 1966 Royal Shakespeare Company revival and his 1975 National Theatre production represents a clear homage to Ernest Jones. More exciting, though, is the idea of doubling Hamlet and the Ghost, as in Richard Eyre's 1980 Royal

[6] James L. Hill, "'What, are they children:' Shakespeare's Tragic Women and the Boy Actors," *Studies in English Literature*, 26, no. 2 (Spring, 1986), 235–58.
[7] Ralph Berry, "Hamlet's Doubles," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 37, no. 2 (Summer, 1986), 204–12.

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Court production with Jonathan Pryce, whose powerful performance of the Ghost speaking through Hamlet was much praised at the time. This doubling "crystallizes the underground logic of the play," in which Hamlet's consciousness is at the centre of everything and his self-consciousness sees images of himself in others. Yes, indeed; but only, of course, if that's what you see as fundamental to Hamlet. To argue for this, of course, is beyond the brief of Berry's article, and a critic must be granted the licence to pursue a specific exemplification of a more general argument. But this does remind us that the real Hamlet exists in a myriad minds' eyes.

As is demonstrated splendidly in Simon Williams's[8] examination of the theatrical versions of *Hamlet* played in Germany during the 1770s, in which he perceives the popular German theatre gradually moving away from the tastes of the aristocratic court theatre with its devotion to French classical values. This shift is traced through (i) the version of *Hamlet* by Christoph Martin Wieland (published 1766), which probably formed the basis of the first German production of a play resembling Shakespeare's in 1770 and in which the vigour of the original language is much reduced, resulting in a Hamlet of a sentimentalized kind that may well have influenced Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*; (ii) Franz Heufeld's acting version of 1773, where the character of Hamlet is simplified in order to be subservient to an action which narrows the play's scope to that of a family drama (only Acts 1–3 are dramatized, and Hamlet is left unscathed to take over Denmark after what seems to be an intriguingly rapid catastrophe in Gertrude's bedroom); (iii) Friedrich Ludwig Schöder's 1776 production with Brockmann as Hamlet, which restored such elements as the role of Laertes and Ophelia's mad scenes; (iv) Schröder's 1778 revision, with himself as Hamlet, in which the wild and irreverent aspects of the hero were restored and Schröder's performance was appropriately more acerbic than had been Brockmann's. Him all scenes of Europe homage owe: not of an age, but of all ages made anew.

W. HUTCHINGS

[8]Simon Williams, The 'Great Guest' Arrives: Early German *Hamlets*," *Theatre Journal*, 38, no. 3 (October 1986), 291–308.

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Hamlet in the Ozarks—an Overview

That Shakespeare's most popular play remains a universal treasure was clear once again in Fayetteville, Arkansas, when from March 6th to 8th, 1987, the University of Arkansas, sited in the beautiful foothills of the Ozarks, hosted a splendid symposium on the tragedy, organized with great efficiency and imagination by Professors Kent Brown of the Department of Drama and Joseph Candido of the Department of English. The conference was jointly funded by the two departments, with the aid of a grant from the Arkansas Endowment for the Humanities. Charles R. Forker (Indiana University), Janet Stavropoulos (Gettysburg College), Joseph Candido, and Roger Gross (both of Arkansas) acted as respondents; and lively debate ensued. Participants were invited to submit revised versions of their essays to *Hamlet Studies*, and several of these have been accepted for publication in this and forthcoming issues.

J. L. Styan, Franklin Bliss Snyder Professor of English at Northwestern University, delivered a witty keynote address, "On Seeing *Hamlet* in Performance," that reminded its enthusiastic audience in diverse ways of how experience of the play in the theatre has continued to shape, define, and enrich our appreciation of it. As Professor Styan pointed out, scholars are more open today than they used to be to the unique kinds of interpretive insight that derive from performance, and his talk, with its impressive range of historical anecdotes and examples, helped to demonstrate, even to the most resistant, the profound symbiosis that ties the literary text of a great play to its stage enactment and vice versa.

Naturally, the variety of approaches and emphases in the papers that followed was predictable. Yashdip S. Bains of the University of Cincinnati, in "Shakespeare's Revision of *Hamlet*," presented an argument for Shakespeare's progressive rewriting of the play in three stages—Q1, Q2, and F—in direct opposition to Harold Jenkins, the Arden editor. Bains, obviously much influenced by Steven Urkowitz's work on the two versions of *Lear* and by the Stanley Wells-Gary Taylor Oxford edition of Shakespeare, believes that the author's conception of *Hamlet* underwent profound change, the more eloquent, contemplative, and skeptical Prince of Q2 being a prominent symptom of the altered perspective. Bains, of course, rejects the theory of memorial reconstruction, not only for Q1 *Hamlet* but for sixteenth-century drama in general, regarding the earliest quarto not as a reported text but as "a carelessly transcribed manuscript" of a genuine Shakespearean original. David E. Jones (University of Utah) reinforced Styan's point about the significance of performance by analyzing "The Theatricality of the First Quarto of

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Hamlet." Like Bains, Jones has greater respect for Q1 than has customarily been granted it—but on grounds of its superior economy and dramatic structure (specifically its more logical order of scenes), its "tighter integration" of plot, and its "more coherent psychic development" in the title character. Jones concedes that the language of Q2 and F is much finer than that of Q1: he therefore urges the adoption of an acting text that would preserve the cuts and dramatic sequence of the first quarto while incorporating the poetry of the verbally less garbled versions, thus producing an edition of *Hamlet* that would represent as faithfully as possible "its author's last thoughts" as regards both structure and wording.

Robert F. Willson's suggestive paper, "Hamlet's Ghostly Presence," seemed also to be inspired by performance; for its basic insight—namely that the prince in symbolic ways fulfills the role of, or becomes a dramatic surrogate for, his father—was rooted in the scene of Olivier's 1948 film where we see "an etherial Hamlet" act out in pantomime Ophelia's narrated account of how he visited her closet in strangely altered garb "As if he had been loosed out of hell / To speak of horrors" (2.1.80–81). Willson (University of Missouri, Kansas City) traced out the various episodes in which Shakespeare suggests a kind of ghostly identity of the older with the younger Hamlet: in the play-within-the-play, for instance, the prince urges the actor who plays Lucianus (a symbolic embodiment of the revenger and therefore of Hamlet himself) to get on with the crucial business of murder, just as the Ghost later prompts his son so as "to whet [his] almost blunted purpose" (3.4.111).

A set of more theoretically oriented essays made up a second group. In "Hamlet's Too Curious Considerations," R. Lyell Asher (University of Virginia) explored the undependability of the play's world—its sense of blurred or indistinct boundaries, of puzzling replacements and substitutions, of objects and persons doubling, relocating, or invading unaccustomed spaces, and of the sense in which intellectual curiosity about the universe constitutes (in Renaissance terms) a threat to psychic stability and metaphysical order. The tragedy, in Asher's view, helps dramatize the interchange between the free play of the mind (which, at is most extreme, can lead to the breakdown of all distinctions and hence to madness) and "a healthy acceptance of limits." Norma Jenckes (University of Cincinnati) investigated *Hamlet* through feminist spectacles. Her paper, "Narcissus at Elsinore," attempted to show how "the hegemony of a phallocratic worldview with its dream of male perfection misdirects and oppresses" the prince: Claudius, Polonius, and the Ghost all represent versions of "the unvanquished father" which they try to impose upon Hamlet, thus perpetuating in him a kind of cultural narcissism based upon male exclusivity

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and the rejection of female openness. Only in his "love relationship" with Horatio does Hamlet nearly "solve the problem of admitting the radical other," thus acknowledging by implication his need for full human relationship in his quest for wholeness and readiness. Arnold W. Preussner (University of Kansas) illuminated the connection between comic and tragic form in *Hamlet* by comparing and contrasting the handling of delay in the revenge play with that in a comedy written almost contemporaneously: *Twelfth Night*. Drawing upon Susan Snyder's *Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's Tragedies*,* Preussner in his paper entitled "Waiting in *Hamlet* and *Twelfth Night*" suggests that a comic tradition of frustrated desire and delayed fulfillment underlies and informs the tragic shape of the later play.

Three studies took up various aspects of the background of *Hamlet*. In "The Fabric of the Universe Rent: *Hamlet* as an Inversion of *The Courtier*," Barbara A. Johnson (Indiana University) considered the prince and his world as constituting a multi-faceted negative refraction of the humanistic ideals and models of courtiership enunciated by Castiglione in his famous courtesy book. Interestingly, as she suggests, the connection between Urbino and Elsinore could be historical as well as ideological, for one of the participants in the Italian dialogue (the future Duke of Urbino) was later poisoned in a fashion that may have suggested *The Murder of Gonzago* to Shakespeare. Martin W. Walsh (University of Michigan) spoke fascinatingly about the complex symbolism of the skull in the *memento mori* literature and iconography of late medieval and Renaissance Europe: "'This Same Skull, Sir': Layers of Meaning and Tradition in Shakespeare's Most Famous Prop." Walsh shows how the decaying remains of Yorick link up in rich association with a whole range of theological, literary, and homiletic depictions of vanity. These touch nearly all aspects of the tragedy—not least the prince himself, who relates so tenderly, yet macabrely, to a stage property that is at once human character and repulsive object, that catalyzes a mixture of humor and pathos, and that, as an emblematic composite of Folly, Wisdom, and Death, lies at the very core of the tragedy's most compelling irony. A return to archetypalism defined the approach of Irving Wolfe (Université de Montréal), who in his paper, "New Analogues to *Hamlet*," was at pains to point out elements of overlap that relate the revenge tragedy not only to Norse, Roman, and Greek mythology, but also to folkloristic parallels in the *Popol Vuh*, a long poem on the symbolic history of the Mayan Indians of Guatemala (translated by Spanish missionary priests about 1550). Wolfe enumerated some twenty-seven

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points of narrative contact between the play and the Central American poem. Although he makes no claim for direct influence upon Shakespeare, he thinks the power of *Hamlet* resides "not in its individuality" but rather in those features that universalize it and establish analogical connections to the myths of other and far-distant cultures.

A final group of papers concentrated on aspects of staging, historical and contemporary. In "*Hamlet* on the South African Stage," W. Rohan Quince (Southern Illinois University) reported fascinatingly on the implications of Shakespeare's play for a deeply divided culture. Quince, a native of South Africa himself, revealingly discussed the very different kinds of meaning *Hamlet* holds for the legally separate racial groups (black, white, "coloured," and Indian) that make up the sociopolitical structure of his much beleaguered country under apartheid. Quince described the first production of *Hamlet* in Afrikaans (1947), an event that helped bolster Afrikaner nationalism, as well as a more anti-government performance by English-speaking students at the University of Cape Town in 1969 and a "coloured" production of 1981, also in Cape Town. In each case the Shakespeare productions have tended to serve as "showcases for the cultural sophistication of each particular group" and, at least indirectly, to reflect their political attitudes and priorities. Peter W. Ferran (University of Michigan) examined Hamlet's brief speech about the poisoning of Gonzago in the play-within-the-play (3.2.261–163), probing the variety of stage movements and vocal inflections that actors can adopt to enrich the meaning and effect of the scene. His paper, "Upon the Talk of Poisoning," laid special stress on the "multi-layered action" that the play-within-the-play promotes in the larger context of *Hamlet*. In "The Dame as Dane: A Comparative Analysis of Two Female Hamlets," Janie Caves McCauley of Bob Jones University lighted up a curious corner of the stage history of the play by surveying the actresses from Sarah Siddons onwards who have assayed the role of the prince. With the aid of slides, photographs, and videotapes, McCauley concentrated on Dame Judith Anderson's 1970 experiment with the part (she was then seventy-two!) and on Diane Venora's 1982 performance (at the age of thirty) under the direction of Joseph Papp.** She concluded with some provocative speculations about the reasons for the long succession of female Hamlets and the paradoxes of gender stereotyping that these attempts would seem to disclose.

The conference ended with an animated but heavily cut performance of *Hamlet*, directed by Roger Gross and Patricia Relph, at the University Theatre in the Fine Arts Center on the Arkansas campus (see the review

**Reviewed by Bernice Kliman in *Hamlet Studies*, 6 (1984).—*Ed.*

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by Robert F. Willson in this volume of *HSt.*) Next morning, Mr. Gross met informally with members of the symposium to discuss specific reactions to the performance and to explain certain of his decisions. Gross had already addressed the symposium in an earlier luncheon speech, defending in more general terms his approach to production problems. It was more than clear that the Prince of Denmark is alive and well in northwestern Arkansas.

CHARLES R. FORKER

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The Prince and the Professor: The Wittenberg Connection in Marlowe, Shakespeare, Goethe, and Frost. By Robert F. Fleissner. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, Universitatsverlag, 1986. Pp. 217.

Robert F. Fleissner's subject is "a quartet of leading figures in world literature: Dr. Faustus, Prince Hamlet, Professor Faust, and the Hebrew Job in Robert Frost's modern guise," and his chief concern, as he says in the Preface, is to analyse "the way in which the Faust (us) Hamlet connection developed from Marlowe's version finally into Goethe's and how all three (Faustus, Hamlet, Faust, especially the last) were accommodated by Frost in *A Masque of Reason*."

Fleissner makes it clear at the outset that he is not going to touch on the question of which work is indebted to which and in what way since "the general subject of what constitutes influence is a difficult one, fraught with subtleties such as the determination and relevance of intent." He focuses, instead, on the "continuum," the "overall thematic relation," between the works in question.

With regard to the three dramatic works—this review, for obvious reasons, excludes Frost—Fleissner's main ideas can be summed up as follows: that the plays inter-relate Christian with pagan and Classical with Romantic elements; that in both *Dr. Faustus* and *Hamlet* "the salvation of the soul is at stake;" that the Ghost and the implications of the Ghost in the Danish tragedy have a bearing on the "symbolic" nature of Mephistophiles in the Faust plays; and that Margarete / Gretchen in Goethe's play looks back to Ophelia in *Hamlet*. The protagonists of all three plays, in Fleissner's view, are Renaissance men at odds with themselves and the world. All of them reject traditional metaphysics: Faustus questions Aristotelian reasoning and Hamlet displays a scepticism that is analogous to Montaigne's relativism. All three heroes suggest an ambiguous attitude towards supernatural beings, and all of them are studies in human striving.

These are clearly challenging ideas and, indeed, the subject of Fleissner's study in itself is thought-provoking. But a problem with the book is that instead of concentrating on the larger aspects of the Wittenberg connection—the "Lutheran tie-in," "the analogous philosophical and theological dilemmas" faced by the protagonists—Fleissner gives too much space to details and discussions which are either irrelevant or, at best, of marginal importance. For instance, how important is it to inquire what part is played by "Sacramentalism" in the three works (especially since the "sacrament of matrimony" hardly figures in *Dr. Faustus* and the "sacrament of penance" in *Hamlet* or *Faust*), or whether the mention

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of the "holy seasons" (Christmas in *Hamlet* and Easter in *Faust*) makes a difference in the meaning of the two plays?

While the discussion of such issues seems excessive, there are others which are treated at length, often independently of the main argument, and which blur the focus and tend to reduce the importance of the author's own larger questions. The chapter devoted to the "Sullied / Solid" controversy is a case in point (a chapter which, incidentally, provides a useful summary of the arguments on either side). Starting with this soliloquy of Hamlet's, Fleissner makes the interesting observation that in both *Hamlet* and *Faust* the protagonists are aware of the "eventual decomposition" to which flesh is subject. But instead of exploring the connection between this awareness and Hamlet's and Faust's desire for self-annihilation or self-extinction on the one hand and, on the other, between suicide and traditional religious or metaphysical attitudes, he undertakes a discussion of alchemy which he sees as the "impetus" behind Hamlet's soliloquy. While this may be so and while there may be "similar alchemic implications" behind some speeches in *Faust*, the point is that this discussion contributes little to the main line of argument and seems rather a distraction.

Professor Fleissner brings together several minor analogies and parallels, some plausible and some not quite so plausible: Laertes and Gretchen's brother; Horatio and Mephistophiles as fellow "wandering scholars;" Polonius and Wagner as pedants and political manipulators; and Mephistophiles in *Dr. Faustus* and the Ghost in *Hamlet* as fellow "cynics." While some of these are undoubtedly interesting, once again they seem to at times hinder rather than help Fleissner's purpose to establish the "continuum" of "*overall* thematic relation." Many small fish get caught in the wide net but perhaps at the expense of the big catch.

Fleissner is fully aware that comparative studies involve exploration of differences as well as likenesses, that the sort of comparison he is attempting would "implicate many more dissimilarities than resemblances." But, in reality, while resemblances abound, dissimilarities tend to be neglected. Thus the opportunity is lost of developing the subject with appropriate complexity and, to this extent, Fleissner's book fails to fulfil its own best possibilities.

But an interesting subject has been broached and what Fleissner has done will undoubtedly provide new lines of thought for students and future researchers.

MYTHILI KAUL

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Hamlet in the American South

Shakespeare and Southern Writers. Edited, with an Introduction, by Philip C. Kolin. University Press of Mississippi, 1985.

Shakespeare in the South. Edited, with an Introduction, by Philip C. Kolin. University Press of Mississippi, 1983.

Philip C. Kolin has edited two scholarly, information-packed volumes: the first of these (hereafter *SS*) is a collection of essay on stage performances of Shakespeare and the second (hereafter *SSW*) a study of Shakespeare's influence on a select number of Southern writers. Each volume complements the other very well. Taken together they serve to tell in readable fashion and through full documentation the story of the fortunes of Shakespeare in Southern theatrical and literary history.

I have always found it intriguing that Edgar Allan Poe, who born in Boston, educated for a time in England, associated with the Fordham section of the Bronx in New York City where he lived with his wife / cousin and aunt / mother-in-law, and critically acclaimed in France, was actually a Southerner, a Virginian. He was the son of two members of the Virginia Players: English-born Elizabeth Arnold and Baltimore's David Poe, whose own father came to America from Ireland. Mrs. Poe, it is thought, played many Shakespearean roles (including Ophelia) with the Virginia company and may have been playing Ophelia during that January in 1809 when Edgar (her son with a Shakespearean name) was born. David Poe may have played minor roles in *Hamlet*. So a major American writer with several international connections is at once associated with the South by parental background and upbringing and with theatrical history involving Shakespeare generally and perhaps *Hamlet* in particular.

In his introduction to *SSW*, Professor Kolin refers to the "firm evidence of Poe's use of and indebtedness to Shakespeare" (p. 5) but reminds us that the volume "makes no claim to be a comprehensive study" (p. 4). But if Poe will have to wait for the sequel to Kolin's fine edition, Mark Twain does not. Thomas J. Richardson's essay, "Is Shakespeare Dead? Mark Twain's Irreverent Question" (*SSW* 63–82) is an excellent starting point for a detailed account of *Hamlet* in the American South. Richardson reminds us that Twain was quite familiar with Shakespeare's works and that *Hamlet* leads the list of the plays to which Twain alluded in his own literary works. As a perennial favorite of Twain *Hamlet* became the one play he wished to burlesque respectfully. In an 1881 letter to William

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Dean Howells Twain wrote, "At your house . . . an old idea came again into my head . . . that of adding a character to *Hamlet*" (*SSW* 69). Howells encouraged the *Hamlet* project, and the result is Twain's unfinished piece in which the Prince of Denmark has a foster brother, Basil Stockmar, a traveling book agent who observes the action of Shakespeare's play as combined narrator and chorus. It has been twenty-three years since Stockmar has seen Hamlet, who was only a baby then. He tells us that if he could only see Hamlet "biting at a rattle," he would then "recognize him in a minute" (*SSW* 71). Stockmar excels in delivering his salespitch and, in fact, rehearses it from time to time, even in the halls of Elsinore:

> Let me call your worship's particular attention to this admirable chapter upon 'The Mythological Era of Denmark.'

Here Twain apparently puns on the importance of the "ear" of Denmark. Whether Stockmar himself is aware of the pun we are not told, but he goes on confidently believing in his product. None of the characters in the play sees Stockmar, but he does have what Richardson calls " three slapstick encounters" with the ghost of Old Hamlet, the last of which convinces Stockmar that the ghost's chasing him is a sign of his wanting to subscribe to publications. Twain's unfinished work on *Hamlet* would have had, according to his working notes, Stockmar playing a more active role with the characters, especially with Laertes whom he would have convinced to go to France, with Polonius whom he would have persuaded to give Laertes leave to go, and with Claudius and Gertrude whom he would get to urge that Hamlet not return to Wittenberg. Alas, Twain's burlesque of *Hamlet* was never completed, but the work done on the piece is enough to show how Tom Stoppard's Beckett-influenced (as well as Shakespeare-influenced) *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead* was long anticipated.

Given Stockmar's remark about Shakespeare's language ("It's the most unnatural stuff! Why, it ain't *human* talk; nobody that ever lived, ever talked the way they do") it is no surprise that in chapter 21 of *Huckleberry Finn* the fraudulent Duke offers a burlesque of Hamlet's 'To be, or not to be" soliloquy, a hodge-podge of snippets from *Hamlet, Macbeth*, and *Richard III*, three plays that were very popular on the stages of the American South. Twain writes a wonderful *pastiche*, and Richardson analyzes the speech usefully offering his own critical insights as well as those who commented on the speech in the past. The chapter on Twain also considers "The Killing of Julius Caesar Localized" (1864), the burlesque *Hamlet* (1881), the Duke's speech in *Huckleberry Finn* (1885), and *Is Shakespeare Dead?* (1909), the last addressing itself to the Baconian question. These writings clearly indicate the interest Mark

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Twain had in Shakespeare's works, especially in the play of *Hamlet*.

Less well-known Southern writers were influenced by *Hamlet*, as Charles S. Watson points out in his essay on William Gilmore Simms (1806–70), a native of Charleston, South Carolina. "Simms's use of Hamlet in creating characters is his most provocative borrowing from Shakespeare," writes Watson, who goes on to explain that Simms "analyzed the leading social class of the South, the planters, whom he saw as suffering from Hamlet's besetting sin, indecision" (*SSW* 20). In the novel *Woodcraft*, Simms portrays the planter, in this case a character named Porgy, as a Hamlet figure reflecting what Simms himself had presented in essay-form in "The Moral Character of Hamlet" (published 1844; presented as lectures in 1854). Expressing the Romantic or Coleridgean view, Simms speaks of a Hamlet with a defective will that brings on the extremes of indecisiveness and impulsive action. Watson's comment is very helpful: "In 'The Moral Character of Hamlet' this native Charlestonian wrote that indecisive men like Hamlet appear only 'in *old* communities' such as Boston and Charleston, not in Texas, where action is indispensible" (*SSW* 21).

Christina Murphy contributes a perceptive essay on another Charlestonian writer: Henry Timrod (1828–67), a poet who belonged to the literary circle involving Simms. In his "Address Delivered at the Opening of the New Theatre at Richmond," Timrod explores various "visions of reality" made emblematic by characters from four Shakespearean plays: *The Tempest, King Lear, Othello*, and *Hamlet* (*SSW* 41). "Like the South," says Murphy, "Hamlet is slow to rise to the call—'He pauses on the very brink of fact / To toy as with the shadow of an act'—but, once challenged, he fights bravely and is willing to sacrifice his life for the attainment of noble ideals" (*SSW* 42).

Certainly more well-known is musician and poet Sidney Lanier (1842–81), a native of Macon, Georgia, whose twentieth-century descendent is another Southern writer: Mississippi-born Thomas Lanier "Tennessee" Williams. In turn both were, as A. L. Rowse likes to point out, descendents of the Elizabethan musician, Will Lanier, who married Emilia Bassano—she of the tawny Italian complexion who, according to Rowse, became Shakespeare's Dark Lady. If Rowse's Dark Lady theory is to be believed, Sidney Lanier's Shakespearean connection is an interesting one indeed. But as reviewers have done regarding Rowse, Thomas Daniel Young's essay comments on Lanier's critical limitations, especially as these reveal themselves in Lanier's lectures on Shakespeare, which tended to be "oblique and eccentric" (*SSW* 51). Lanier spoke of *Hamlet* as a play caught up with man's developing insights into the supernatural. Young informs us that Lanier read Coleridge on *Hamlet*

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and failed to understand fully what he was saying about the play and its central character. Aptly quoting Lanier, Young clearly shows us how the poet–as–critic misses the mark:

> [Hamlet] does not believe in heaven or hell: he makes heaven and hell mere excuses for irresolution. He is a weak, unnerved, good man, who would be strong if he had faith of any sort.
>
> (*SSW* 52).

If Lanier had his difficulties with Shakespeare, William Faulkner had major successes. Timothy Kevin Conley's essay has as its first sub-heading a phrase associated with Faulkner, the author of *The Hamlet* (not without its Shakespearean ingredient), who as a relatively unknown writer (aged twenty-four) found himself challenging the ability of Shakespeare at a gathering of artists in New Orleans. The anecdote is worth quoting:

> Finally the conversation turned to Shakespeare and to *Hamlet*. It was only then that the little man in the corner spoke.
> "I could write a play like *Hamlet* if I wanted to," he said, and then lapsed back into silence.

Conley's sub-heading, "A Play like *Hamlet*," introduces us to a great Southern writer's enduring interest in Shakespeare's great, and perhaps greatest, play. Faulkner's use of Shakespeare, says Conley, "did not extend to academic or scholarly work (as it did with Lanier, Wlliam Gilmore Simms, and later John Crowe Ransom), it did extend to a thorough familiarity with Shakespearean verse—as did the interest of Clemens, Simms, and Lanier" (*SSW* 85). Faulkner considered *Hamlet* Shakespeare's best play from a technical point of view and was not concerned with the authorship problem, as he said in an interview: "... what is important is *Hamlet* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*, not who wrote them, but that somebody did" (*SSW* 90). Conley goes on to remind us that Faulkner's *Sartoris* echoes *Hamlet*: "The novel does have a Horatio left to tell the story, and in a sense Bayard Sartoris is a type of young Dane caught amid ghosts and glories of the past... haunted by the memory of Colonel Sartoris and his brother's death in the wars of better times... Hoarace too echoes Hamlet's lament for this 'too sullied flesh': 'living and seething corruption glossed over for a while by smoothly covered flesh'... [And] Yocona County, like Denmark, is a garden grown rank" (*SSW* 109).

Comments on Faulkner continue in Mark Royden Winchell's essay dealing with Shakespeare's influence on Robert Penn Warren. Here Winchell cites Quentin Compson as one of America's Hamlets (others are Poe's Roderick Usher, Melville's Pierre Glendinning, and Hawthorne's

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Miles Coverdale, to name just a few) and compares this Faulknerian character with Warren's Jack Burden, who in *All the King's Men* is "a neurotic young man . . . caught in the middle of the South's cultural transformation" (*SSW* 151). At the center of Burden's difficulties is the relationship with his mother. Winchell instructively compares this with the Hamlet-Gertrude relationship. Although Warren himself spoke of *Julius Caesar* in connection with *All the King's Men*, he also said that he was reading Elizabethan tragedy generally when writing the novel. One of those tragedies, other than *Julius Caesar*, says Winchell, was very likely *Hamlet*.

Whereas *Shakespeare and Southern Writers* focuses attention on literary art and biography, Kolin's earlier volume, *Shakespeare in the South*, is a critical and historical account of the fortunes of dramatic art. This collection of essays gets underway with a lucid overview by Kolin of stage performances in the American South. Here as well as later in Joseph Patrick Roppolo's "Shakespeare in New Orleans, 1817–1865" we are reminded that audiences consistently responded very well to productions of *Hamlet*. Along with *Richard III* and *Macbeth* it ranked as an extremely popular drama among Southern playgoers (*SS* 7, 121). Even before the war for independence in the American colonies *Hamlet* was prominent as a stage-play. The Lewis Hallam company came to Williamsburg, Virginia in 1752, and *Hamlet* was part of the troupe's repertoire, writes Arnold Aronson (*SS* 24–25); it was also an offering of the David Douglass company, which gave a performance in Fredericksburg, Virginia in 1771. By the nineteenth century productions of Shakespeare in Virginia were an integral part of cultural life. In fact, as Aronson says, "between 1804 and 1806, David Poe performed at Richmond and in 1810 and 1811 Mrs. Poe (Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins) performed" (*SS* 33). These, as indicated earlier, are the parents of Edgar Allan Poe, whose own Hamlet-like existence in Richmond and elsewhere may be a reflection of his early theatrical environment, his possible involvement on the stage as a youngster, and as the son of a father and / or mother who may have played roles in *Hamlet*. What a field day the psychological critics of Poe would have if it ever could be determined that David Poe played Old Hamlet's ghost (or Claudius) and that Mrs. Poe performed the role of Gertrude!

What we do not know about Poe's parents and *Hamlet* we do know about the notorious John Wilkes Booth, President Lincoln's assassin, and the whole Booth clan. John Wilkes Booth played Horatio to Edwin Booth's Hamlet in 1858 in Richmond. In 1856 Baltimore saw native Marylander Edwin Booth as Hamlet, "the role with which he would later

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e most closely identified," writes Christopher J. Thaiss (*SS* 68). Wood-ow L. Holbein's essay on "Shakespeare in Charleston, 1800–1860," iscusses an interesting set of comments on the Hamlet of Junius Brutus ooth, whose effort one reviewer said needed much more acting ex-erience: his lines to the ghost were delivered too rapidly, his advice to he players was given while seated (he should have been standing and esturing), and in the death scene he dropped to the floor too quickly, or he had to rise again to stop Horatio from committing suicide. His cenes with Ophelia and the closet scene were very effective, says the ame reviewer. Later in his career Junius Brutus Booth was too much the eavy drinker and eccentric to become the truly great Shakespearean he ight have become. Linwood E. Orange, in "Shakespeare in Mississippi, 1814–1880," quotes from Mrs. John Drew (the grandmother of the well-nown twentieth-century actors, John, Lionel, and Ethel Barrymore), who writes of the forty-three year old, but rapidly aging, Booth:

> We were playing "Hamlet" one night in Natchez, and during Ophelia's mad scene a cock began to crow lustily. When the curtain fell upon that fourth act this crowing became more constant; and when the manager could not find Mr. Booth to commence the next act he looked up and saw him perched [like a rooster?]... who at last consented to come down on condition that he should resume his high position after the play, and remain there until Jackson was re-elected President.

Kolin's volume on theatrical performance also has much to say about ther Shakespearean actors doing the role of Hamlet in the American outh: Edwin Forrest, William Charles Macready, and the Bateman isters. Ellen Bateman, writes Mary Duggar Toulmin, "impersonated the ane while stock company actress Anna Cruise was Ophelia"(*SS* 149). his anticipation of Sarah Bernhardt's Hamlet is paralleled by an antici-ation of Claire Bloom's recent one-woman theatrical dealing with hakespeare's female characters: namely, Kate Downs P'Pool's *The Women of Shakespeare's Plays* (including Ophelia). This was performed n the early twentieth century at Mississippi Woman's College in attiesburg. Mississippi was also the site of the earliest collegiate erformance of Shakespeare. In the last decade of the nineteenth century arah McGehee Isom directed several Shakespearean plays at the niversity of Mississippi. One of these was *Hamlet*.

Waldo F. McNeir's witty and elegant "The Reception of Shakespeare n Houston, 1839–1880" continues the theme of women and productions f *Hamlet*. McNeir speaks of Sophie Miles's performing the role of amlet in 1873, some nine years prior to the arrival in Houston of the nternational celebrity, Mrs. Langtry, who received $2,000 a night at

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Pilot's Opera House. This is where Edwin Booth played his Hamlet to a packed house in 1886. It was an event that found a now-traditional American activity operating rather energetically: ticket-scalping. McNeir tells us that "ticket-scalping was vicious, seats going for as much as $18 or $20" (*SS* 180). Considering what the American dollar was worth in 1886, scalpers undoubtedly did very well. At least the Houston audience got a decent Hamlet out of Booth. This Hamlet was not at all that of Junius Brutus Booth described by Mrs. John Drew (see above). Edwin Booth's Houston Hamlet, by contrast, was one of "grace, dignity, and naturalness of... interpretation," writes McNeir (*SS* 180). And to return to the involvement of women, McNeir tells us of the Houston Ladies Reading Club that started up in 1885 and that prepared for Booth's appearance a year later by studying *Hamlet*. Another Houston organization, the Axson Club, was founded in 1917 and had as its inspiration the brilliant lecturer Stockton Axson, who praised very highly Fritz Leiber's 1928 and 1929 versions of *Hamlet*. Some five decades later Sidney Berger's Houston Shakespeare Festival offered a stirringly oxymoronic Hamlet, as McNeir describes the characterization: "a melancholic wit, a meditative athlete, a sensuous moralist and finally an active fatalist" (*SS* 194). The success of the Houston company is like that of the North Carolina Shakespeare Festival whose 1981 production of *Hamlet*, according to Larry Champion in his essay on Shakespeare in North Carolina, "established without question the competency of the company to perform Shakespeare's most demanding works" (*SS* 242). All in all, most of us can agree with Virginia's 1863 *Examiner* when it boldly claimed, "Listening to the poetry of Shakespeare is certainly better amusement than bluff, poker, and rot-gut whiskey" (*SS* 42).

Philip Kolin has rewardingly gathered together two collections of highly readable, carefully researched, and well-documented essays. *Shakespeare in the South* and *Shakespeare and Southern Writers* meaningfully fill a gap in Shakespeare studies generally and in the study of *Hamlet* particularly.

VINCENT F. PETRONELLA

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The Italian Shakespearians: Performances by Ristori, Salvini, and Rossi in England and America. By Marvin Carlson. Washington: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1985.

For readers of *Hamlet Studies*, this book offers insights into the Hamlet performances in the nineteenth century of two contemporary Italian actors—Tommaso Salvini and Ernesto Rossi—almost entirely in bi-language productions, in two English–speaking countries. (Adelaide Ristori, the third actor Carlson discusses, played Lady Macbeth but not Ophelia or Gertrude.) Like many of their contemporaries, the two men made efforts to return to Shakespeare's texts and are praised in contemporary accounts for compelling presence and believability. Their extremely passionate portrayals do not preclude "realism," and indeed Carlson considers them to be early practitioners in the realistic manner.

It is sometimes surprising to recall that Shakespeare has not always received the adulation that is his today. Carlson reminds us of the other side of Shakespeare's reception with a chapter on the influence of Voltaire's anti-Shakespearean bias on Italian culture. As interest in Shakespeare rose in the West in the nineteenth century, improved translations appeared in Italy, leading ultimately to Giulio Carcano's 1852 translation of *Othello* for Rossi, who, however, having lost control of his own company, could not use it. He remained, nevertheless, very interested in Shakespeare's texts; after he met Kean in London, he brought back *Hamlet* and *Othello* to study. Though by 1855 Carlson detects a new tolerance for Shakespeare in Italy, the Italian Shakespeareans, at least at first, found a more cordial reception among the Americans and the English. Their tours were, however, far from unqualified successes, particularly with respect to *Hamlet*.

Regarding the texts that were used, since Charles H. Shattuck (in *The Shakespeare Promptbooks*) does not list any *Hamlet* promptbooks for the Italians, Carlson provides a service with his comments on cuts and restorations. While the reader would have been helped by a chart of lines and by references in the index to texts, cuts, and restorations, it is possible to piece together valuable information.

For his *Hamlet*, Salvini restored some scenes but cut many more, including many of the segments between Polonius and Hamlet. Salvini reduced the contacts between Hamlet and Horatio and cut the advice to the players to plunge directly into the play-within-a-play. In addition to textual cuts, there was also textual reshaping. Act 3, scene 1, for example, ends with Hamlet's exit on "To a nunnery, Go!" The next act, however,

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begins with Claudius's speech from 3.1, "Love! His affections do not that way tend." The division orchestrates the scenes to concentrate attention on Hamlet.

Though Rossi's text for *Hamlet* was closer to Shakespeare's than Salvini's and others', he did not garner any praise thereby, perhaps because he lengthened his performance interminably—what with a more complete text and extensive business during and between the lines for clarification—or perhaps because some reviewers thought that he was *inventing* additions rather than restoring Shakespeare, as, for instance, when he stabs Claudius *and* makes him drink off the poison. Beginning with the prose translation by Rusconi, modified by Rossi's understanding of the play and Kean's versions, he did, in fact, add some lines—often making obvious what was more subtle in Shakespeare. Rossi stressed, for example, Laertes' awareness of the exchange of foils by adding the line: "Why, you give me your foil."

Of course, there were also the inevitable cuts. Rossi, like most others, cut much of the fourth act, with the lengthy absence of Hamlet. The last scene ended, as in many productions, with the line "The rest is silence."

As for the actual Italian language, Carlson gives only little tastes of the Italian and the English re-translations. "A little more than kin and less than kind" becomes, in the English libretto sold at Salvini's performances, "a little more than a cousin and less than a son" (p. 81). As Carlson notes, the Italian translation was flat. Because English-speaking audiences probably understood little Italian, the actors' sonority and gestures, their interesting impersonations coupled possibly with the audience's own recollection of Shakespeare's words, perhaps made these actors more attractive in English-speaking countries than they could be in Italy where the flat Italian would be a decided handicap.

Italian acting style, in the Italian language for English-speaking audiences, entailed point by point illustration through mime. Carlson discusses such matters as facial and vocal expression, gestures and movement, and scene by scene interpretation, concentrating on the points that the actors made. In the last chapter he usefully sums up the Italian style. His pictures for each actor as Hamlet, posed views, convey little of the dynamic effect of the actors in performance but provide some sense of their presence, costume and makeup. We can see Salvini's robust and Rossi's fat Hamlet—both of which earned disapprobation from the critics.

A big man, Salvini played a Hamlet distressed in soul, but bold and physical—when, Carlson notes, contemplative Hamlets were preferred. Whether or not Salvini's attributes moved contemporaries, the descriptions Carlson uses make the Salvini Hamlet seem an appealing version—

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"natural, quiet, meditative tone," "power and intelligence," a "cold-blooded, Italinate, vendetta-inspired figure." The first important scene was 1.4, where he "stressed the radical change in Hamlet after the encounter with the ghost," from dignified melancholy to tense revengefulness. He cut all humor, for example the "swear" sequence in 1.4—yet in *Othello* he had introduced humor "where no other tragedian of the period would have considered using [it]" (p. 67). The great point that Carlson makes, in fact, is that the Italian actors thought through each play individually, and constructed each role separately. Thus humor in *Othello* does not automatically mean humor in *Hamlet*. Carlson asserts that Salvini's reactions to others' speeches were as "complex and specific as the gestures and expressions which he used to support his own lines" (p. 64).

Critics praised Salvini's "To be" highly. Tender with Ophelia, Hamlet's madness was clearly feigned. In the nunnery scene, he notices Polonius and Claudius because they move. Like Kemble and Fechter, Salvini throws into the air the pages of the manuscript he holds during the play-within-a-play. In all his roles, he began quietly and built to a crescendo; in fact, to peak upon peak.*

Since Rossi and Salvini played in America at the same time, comparisons by contemporaries were inevitable. Rossi did not gain by the comparison—even in those parts of the country where Salvini had not preceded him. Like Ristori, Rossi added some English to his parts, thereby achieving chauvinistic applause for the effort. His *Hamlet* had its unique touches, such as his brutal treatment of both Ophelia and Gertrude, whom he drags about the stage, and from whom he tears the locket she wears about her neck. In act two, Rossi brought out the manic humor that Salvini had repressed. Unlike Salvini, Rossi's Hamlet is unaware of Laertes' treachery and wounds him accidentally. Sometimes, however, Rossi followed Salvini, as when he has Polonius refer to Hamlet, not the player, when he says, "Look, whether he has not turned his color." His Hamlet, a rather low-keyed portrayal, gained in power from rapid changes of mood.

Professor Carlson's book provides a picture of a curious development in international Shakespeare production. Through his overview, he adds to our present understanding of performance history.

BERNICE W. KLIMAN

*One recalls Yeats's remark in his *Autobiography*: "Who would look at Hamlet in the grave scene if Salvini played the grave-digger?"—*Ed.*

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Hamlet Among the Questions of Theory

Shakespeare and The Question of Theory. Edited by Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York and London: Methuen, 1985). Pp. 335 + xiii.

The problems of literary theory, until recently unnoted and neglected, have explosively regenerated the study of literature in many areas. That, at least, is the normal claim made by literary theorists themselves. Certainly the advent of theoretical concerns in the study of English Literature has tended to create a transnational dimension alongside of (or on top of) the traditional linguistic exclusiveness. English Departments in North America, for instance, often resemble, both in their range of scholarly interests and in their collective smalltalk, Comparative Literature Departments. Theory has raised two important classes of problem. In the first place, it has taught students of literature to take the "reality" of the literary text as a true problem. The ontological status of the text, the nature of textuality itself, the limits and validity of representation, how texts come to be known and understood, their investment in ideologies and the relation of ideology to reading, are all theoretical questions. In the second place, literary theory has sharpened critical questions, not only in raising new categories of questions but in re-focussing old ones as well. The smallest claim that theory might make is that it helps to quicken critical wits. Its largest claim would be that it provides actual tools for literary analysis and (perhaps) interpretation. In this latter sense, literary theorists transform general models (coherent theories about the nature, ontological status and representational validity of the literary text) into practical interpretive methods. Much tends to become lost in this transformation, and the inverse process, of moving from interpretive analysis back to theoretical model, is ordinarily quite murky.

Shakespeare and The Question of Theory collects a number of essays that claim to exemplify current literary theory on the level of interpretive method. In the best essays, some of the problems that revolve around the nature of textuality and the validity of representation are raised, but the general tendencies of the collection are overwhelmingly practical, interpretive and traditional. The essays focus upon individual plays and, though they may all claim to ask either fresh or re-focussed questions, tend to settle down into both familiar and normal paths of analysis. The essays are divided into four groupings: "Language, rhetoric,

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Deconstruction," "The woman's part," "Politics, economy, history," and "The question of *Hamlet*." The groupings clearly indicate the editorial agenda. Generally, they exemplify only three theoretical models. Though these models may be the most important, particularly in American literary studies, one does regret the absence of essays involving a consideration of Phenomenology. The three theoretical models, or generalized positions, illustrated in the collection are: Post-structuralism (including, but not exclusively so, Deconstruction), Feminism, and Neo-Marxism (with passing attention paid to Bakhtin nad Foucault, and much weight given to the so-called New History). The concluding section of three essays on *Hamlet* reflects the editors' conviction, neither wrong nor uncommon, that theory does re-focus old questions and that the best way to demonstrate this proposition is by a reconsideration of classic texts. *Hamlet*, as it always seems to do, stands out as the primary target for new approaches to Shakespeare.

There are four essays in the collection devoted to the analysis of *Hamlet*. The first of these, Elaine Showalter's "Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism," occurs in the group of essays, "The woman's part," that are intended to exemplify the range of feminism's critical applications. The other three, making up the final grouping, are Robert Weimann's "Mimesis in *Hamlet*," Margaret W. Ferguson's "*Hamlet*: letters and spirits," and Terence Hawkes' "*Telmah*." All four essays are instructive, but only one is (in this reviewer's opinion) among the better essays in the collection. With the exception of Hawkes' bracing blend of Neo-Marxism and Semiotics, none of the four actually does much to exemplify *contemporary* theory. They rather seem to burrow into familiar patterns of interpretation, making quite normal gestures of one kind or another.

Showalter's essay traces, in necessarily truncated form, the history of the representation of Ophelia in a stage tradition that has been dominated and informed by men. Referring to an essay by Jacques Lacan in which he claims, among other things, that the etymology of "Ophelia" is "O-phallus," Showalter writes, "I would like to propose instead [of various male interpretations of the character that enforce her marginality] that Ophelia *does* have a story of her own that feminist criticism can tell; it is neither her life story, nor her love story, nor Lacan's story, but rather the *history* of her representation (p. 79). Showalter then traces what essentially must be the history of male interpretations of Ophelia, all of which, however much they may differ among themselves over the three centuries of recorded performance, are based upon conventions that "carry messages about femininity and sexuality" (p. 80). Female madness, largely a construct of male analysts, reflects the potentialities, whether repressed

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or expressed, inhibited or exhibited, of female sexuality. Hence the history of Ophelia turns out to be the record of (male) theories of female insanity. Actresses since the Restoration have performed the role of Ophelia quite differently, but they have necessarily all followed the directors' derived notions of female madness. By the nineteenth century, Showalter notes, the correlation between the character of Ophelia and theories of female madness had become so standard that actual mad women occasionally imitated performances of Ophelia. The twentieth century has allowed for "both a male and a female discourse on Ophelia" (p. 89). One consequence of this split discourse has been that actresses have chosen the part of Ophelia in order to make statements of their own about sexuality. Finally, Showalter writes, since the 1970s there has been "a feminist discourse which has offered a new perspective on Ophelia's madness as protest and rebellion" (p. 91).

Showalter's discussion rests heavily upon the empirical history of stage representation. This seems an extremely traditional manner of approaching Shakespeare. After all, it cannot be news that performances of Ophelia manifest normal ideas of women and madness and that there is an identifiable historical transformation of these ideas. It would be impossible to think of any character that would not reflect, to some extent at least, a similar series of transformations. Stage performances display the directors' minds and these minds are, on the level of general knowledge, theoretical thinking and ideology, largely commonplace and derivative. Showalter does suggest that the "feminist revision of Ophelia comes as much from the actress's freedom as from the critic's interpretation" (p. 80) and this might be thought to constitute a relatively fresh understanding of how Shakespeare's plays should be performed (each actor and actress working independently of the director), but there is no evidence of how this uncertain principle might unfold in practice. Showalter's conclusion that there is "no 'true' Ophelia for whom feminist criticism must unambiguously speak, but perhaps only a Cubist Ophelia of multiple perspectives, more than the sum of all her parts" (p. 92) does not seem either original or very forceful. Much Shakespearean criticism of the past half century (at least) has advanced similar propositions. The emphasis upon the empirical history of productions, upon performances as the basis for interpretation, and upon multiple perspectives marks the massively traditional nature of Showalter's essay. There are few questions of theory here.

Rather similar comments may be made concerning Robert Weimann's essay on mimesis. Wiemann begins by noting the "number of challenging propositions which cut deep" into the ordinary assumptions of Shakespearean criticism about continuity and congruity (p. 275). He cites

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Deconstruction as a particular challenge, but it is evident from his discussion that this is only a strawman. Wiemann's notion that Deconstruction's "textualizing methodology" (p. 276) somehow challenges normal Shakespearean criticism by reducing the plays to "texts" (i.e., words written on paper) seems patently narrow and out-of-focus. (One might say that Weimann confronts Deconstruction on one leg: from such an unbalanced stance, he asks several poor questions and begs good ones). The subsequent discussion, bent entirely towards proving the proposition that the theatre is primary and that its history indicates that the "text" (conceived of in Weimann's narrow fashion) is inadequate to the complexities of Shakespearean drama, imposes this parodic notion of Deconstruction throughout. There is no recognition that, for Deconstruction, the "theatre" or all stage productions, taken separately or collectively, would be "text" in the fullest sense. Nothing takes place on the stage, it would be said, no gestures, no movements, nor words, not even intonations and nuances, except in terms of a pre-existing semiotic system that gives them voice. Hence the denial of the claims made by Deconstruction, based upon the assertion that a Shakespearean play in performance is vastly more complex than the same play in its textual form only, fails to inspire conviction. Even if it could be shown to be the case (and it is a case that, for many reasons, lacks conclusiveness) that a play in performance is greater than its text, which then functions something like a musical score, this would scarcely lay a hand on an exuberant deconstructor. Deconstruction concerns itself with signs, only some of which are verbal, and with their openness and free play. A clown's gestures, say, are fully signs and operate within a textual system characterized by labyrinthine indeterminancy.

Weimann's main argument is that a "crisis of authority" with respect to mimesis (which, in Shakespeare, "comprehends so many functions that neither the traditional or classical nor the poststructuralist approach to mimesis can do justice to them all") pervades Shakespearean drama written around the date of *Hamlet* and that *Hamlet* itself best reflects this crisis in the contradiction between "what is representing and what is represented" (p. 278). *Hamlet* contains a complex and many-levelled commentary upon the problem of mimesis. "The mimesis of mimesis," Weimann writes, "is deeply built into the play at large" (p. 282). The body of the essay, then, strives to develop this point. It should be said plainly that Weimann's discussion is extremely interesting and that it does cast light both upon the problem of mimesis and upon the intricacies of *Hamlet*. However, it also labours heavily to naturalize "Shakespearean text" (and its entailed problems of representation) on the level of theatre, and thus to take from the Deconstructionists the foundation of their

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position. To some extent, this seems to involve a number of vulgar assumptions, such as the claim that the "world" of popular theatre was necessarily plebian (p. 283), and a number of begged questions.

Weimann's treatment of theoretical positions is skittish and superficial. For instance, one may note how Bakhtin and Derrida jostle together in the following utterance (which refers to the "impertinency" implicit in Hamlet's pun, at 1.2. 65, "A little more than kin, and less than kind"): "The element of subversion involved in it is obvious; it has its analogies in an oral and prerational culture of topsy-turvy misrule, and is worlds removed from any deconstructable discourse in the forms of textualized logocentricity" (p. 285). Bakhtin's translinguistic model shows briefly in the opaque allusion to the concept of carnival while Derrida's post-structuralism re-appears in the parodic version that the essay initially presented. The contribution to *Hamlet* studies from the direction of theory is painfully nugatory.

Rather similar comments may be made concerning Margaret W Ferguson's essay on wordplay in *Hamlet*. What Ferguson has to say is certainly interesting and may well enlighten students of *Hamlet*. She calls attention to some puzzling words in *Hamlet* and to the subtle associative networks that link them. In particular, her analysis of the word "matter" and of the name "Lamord" in the tale of magical horsemanship that Claudius tells Laertes (4.7. 81–91) are penetrating and rich in insight. To give her discussion a conceptual framework (other than a simple formalistic interest in wordplay and ambiguity), Ferguson invokes the opaque notion of "materialization." Hamlet's language, in his dialogues with other characters but not in soliloquy, materializes language "in a way that forces us to question the distinction between literal and figurative meanings, and that also leads us to look in new ways at the word as a spoken or written phenomenon" (p. 292). She identifies two kinds of verbal materialization, the second of which she finds to be "more disturbing" and locates it in the later part of the play. This second kind of materialization she crisply calls "incorpsing" (after Claudius' word in the tale to Laertes—a word not used elsewhere in Shakespeare's plays) and it seems to describe certain uses of narrative personification. She also, evidently in a further effort to provide a conceptual framework, calls this verbal reflexivity "performative," though the term as she uses it bears little or no relation to its technical definition in (as it is called) Speech Act Theory, the model of linguistic analysis developed by J. L. Austin and John Searle and trendily taken over by numerous literary critics.

Though it is interesting from the standpoint of investigating the wordplay in *Hamlet*, Ferguson's essay does not actually bring much contemporary theory to bear. One must take the initial claim that certain

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incorpsing locutions are "performative" to be mere ornamentation. There are a few Deconstructive gestures scattered throughout the essay (such as the proposition, not in itself incorrect, that Shakespeare has a tendency to "blur generic boundaries"), but these do not add up to a consistent poststructuralist method. Its ornamental trappings stripped away, the essay reveals a familiar exercise in formal analysis. Its spirit certainly, and the letters of its analysis as well, rest in New Criticism.

By far, the most fruitful use of contemporary literary theory in the four essays on *Hamlet* is Terence Hawkes' "*Telmah*."[1] Hawkes combines two separate lines of analysis, one semiological, the other sociological (or Neo-Marxist, or perhaps New Historical). There is a certain amount of dashing, surface brilliance (what Leavesian critics often call "cleverness"), but the direction of the argument is very, even mordantly, serious. Hawkes' essay argues that English society possesses a massive, if normally unacknowledged, ideological consensus and that *Hamlet* serves (or has been co-opted by) that ideology. "In our society," Hawkes writes, "in which *Hamlet* is embedded in the ideology in a variety of roles, the play has, for complex and historical reasons, always already begun. And onto its beginning we have always already imprinted a knowledge of its course of action, and its ending" (p. 312). The procedures of Hawkes' argument are twofold: first, to show that an interpretation of *Hamlet* constantly forces one to read backwards, to look behind an action or a discourse to its preconditions, in the "fundamental mode" of "looking backwards, re-vision, or reinterpretation, the running of events over again" (p. 313) and that the play encodes this recursiveness in its very structure; second, to show that in a centrally illustrative case, John Dover Wilson's attack upon W. W. Greg's revisionary interpretation of *Hamlet*, a reading of the play presupposes English consentaneous ideology.

Greg's objections to the "smooth surface" of *Hamlet*, the rationally orthodox interpretation that seeks for unity, progression and coherence, deeply offended Dover Wilson and, it seems, struck him with the force of a sudden blow when he first read Greg's article in the *Modern Language Review* (1917). Hawkes correlates Dover Wilson's hostile response to his earlier (and pseudonymous) attacks upon the reform movement in

[1] "*Telmah* reappears as chapter 5 in Hawkes recent book, *That Shakespherian Rag: Essays on a Critical Process* (London and New York: Methuen, 1986).

[2] Scholars who are find themselves fascinated by the general issue of the bearing of contemporary literary theory upon Shakespearean studies should also note the existence of *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis (London and New York: Methuen, 1985). Methuen's role in the current revision of Shakespeare studies has been extremely powerful. Someone (such as Terence Hawkes) needs to write an essay on that role.

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Czarist Russia. Not to like change, to be shocked and traumatized by change, whether political or critical, displays an attitude of mind in which a dominant (or preconditionary) ideology has been deeply encoded. The case of Dover Wilson's attack upon Greg, and his lifelong dedication to the counter-argument in favour of critical orthodoxy, exemplifies the power of *Hamlet* as a culturally inscribed text. It also exemplifies, Hawkes argues, the rigidity of normal "Eurocentric" interpretive criticism. A poststructuralist note enters Hawkes' essay in its conclusion: the interpretation of *Hamlet* demands, what the Eurocentric emphasis upon authority and orthodoxy cannot give, the recognition of the text's plurality, the sense of "a text as a cite, or an area of conflicting and often contradictory potential interpretations" (p. 330). The model that Hawkes then proposes, as stunning as it is abrupt, fairly glistens: it is that of American jazz music in which interpretation *constitutes* art. Jazz, in one sense or another (improvising or playing with, say), has defined the "transatlantic mode in our century and before it, to an extent that might now force us to recognize that criticism makes Americans of us all" (p. 331).

The last sentence of Hawkes' essay, and the last sentence in *Shakespeare and The Question of Theory*, puns upon Fortinbras' name to link him to the "name of the greatest black American jazz trumpeter" (p. 331). This seems like an appropriate conclusion for a collection most of whose contributors are American (including Parker, who is Canadian, there are only five non-American contributors). Some readers might think that there is a pervasively jazzy, improvisational quality to the collection. Yet, at their best, the essays do put many of the classic problems of Shakespearean criticism into fresh perspectives and raise other problems that simply elude the boundaries of traditional criticism. This seems to be all that one should reasonably require from Theory. If it helps one to re-focus old problems and brings into view a number of previously imperceptible problems, then Theory has been justified. Unhappily, three of the four essays on *Hamlet*, being thoroughly traditional analyses trumped up with a little conceptual window-dressing, fail to do justice to the potentialities of literary theory. Since the essays by Showalter, Weimann and Ferguson are instructive enough in their old-fashioned ways, it may seem pointless to make this objection. However, they do appear in a collection of essays that both proclaims its allegiance to Theory and strongly suggests the enlightenment that this will bring. Indeed, several of the essays in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory* live up to this promise, but they deal with plays other than *Hamlet*. (For example, this reviewer found the two most exciting essays in the collection to be

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Howard Felperin's "'Tongue-tied our queen?': the deconstruction of presence in *The Winter's Tale*" and Patricia Parker's "Shakesepare and rhetoric: 'dilation' and 'delation' in *Othello*.") One must conclude that the collection fulfils the promise of its title only unevenly. Students of *Hamlet* should read them in the general context of Shakespearean studies, but, as contributions to our understanding of *Hamlet* in the light of current literary theory, with guarded expectation.

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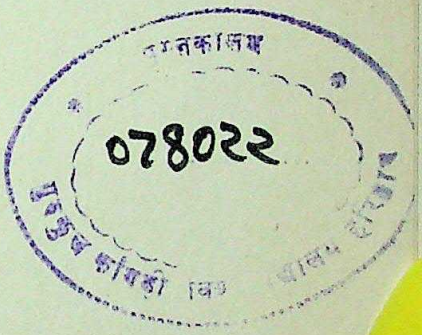

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